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Dante at Ravenna

Catherine Mary Phillimore

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CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

May 1st, 1899.

To the Members of the Dante Society:

I am requested by Miss Catherine M. Phillimore, of London, England, a member of the Dante Society, to forward to every member of the Society, with her compliments, a copy of her book, "Dante at Ravenna." This I take great pleasure in doing.

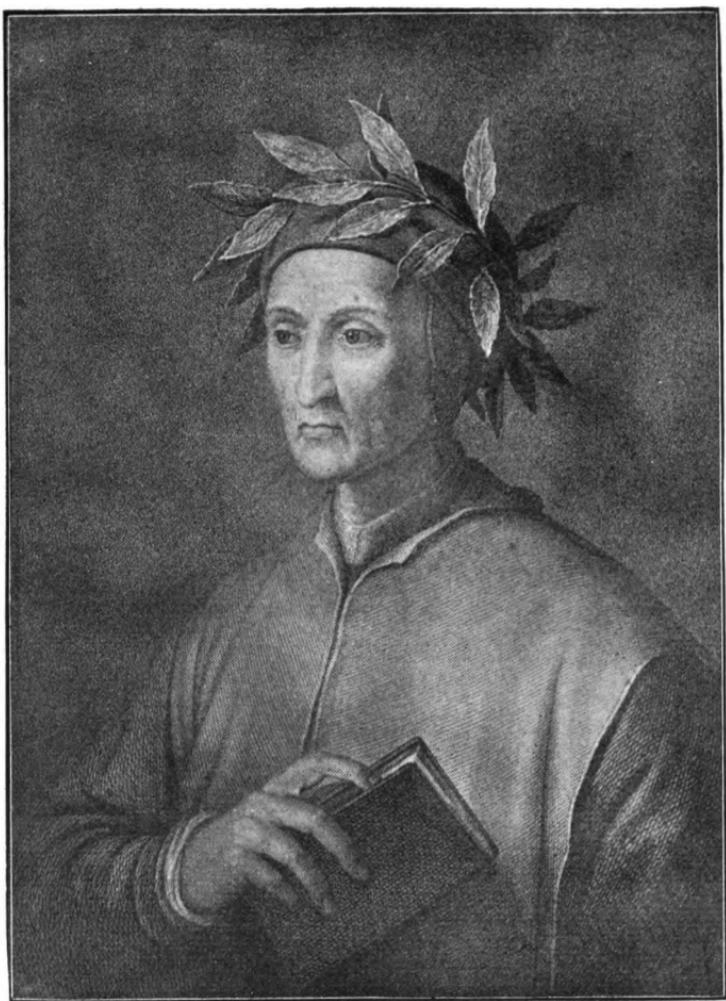
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DANTE AT RAVENNA.

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DANTE ALIGHIERI.

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DANTE AT RAVENNA.

A Study

BY

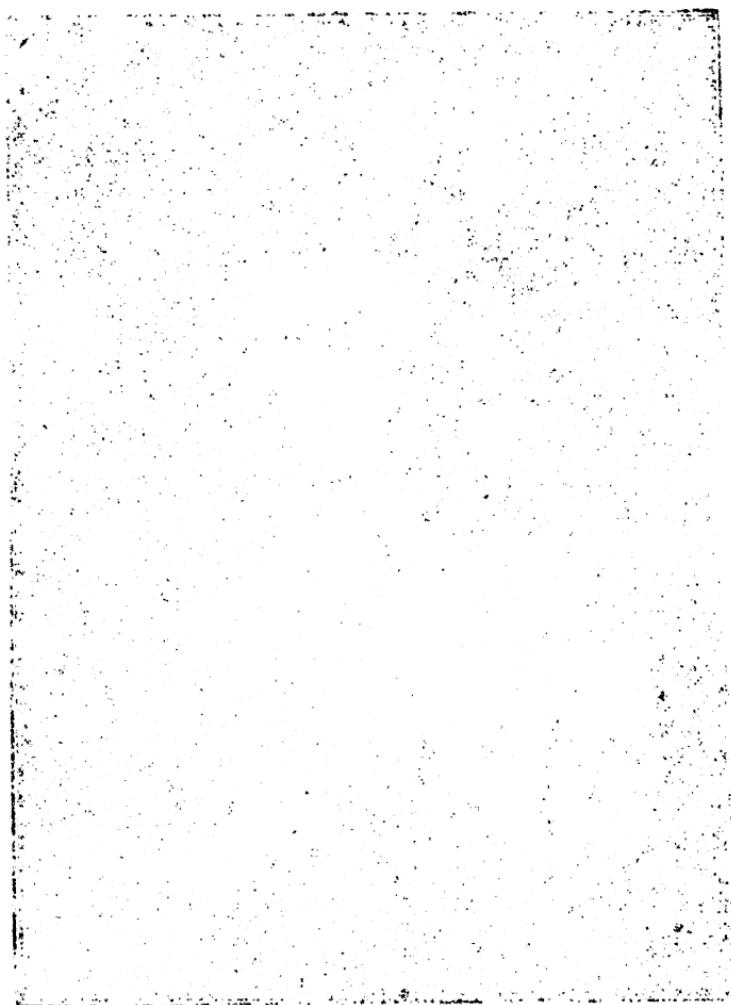
CATHERINE MARY HILLIMORE,

A. L. BOK, M.A.

STUDIES IN ITALIAN LITERATURE. THE STUDY OF NOLCE'S "DRA VENNA" AND
"SELEZIONI DI POESIE DI DANTE ALIGHIERI." A PAPER READ
AT THE FRENCH LITERATURE, PARIS.



LONDON
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
1898.



FRONTISPICE.

Frontispiece.

DANTE AT RAVENNA.

A Study

BY

CATHERINE MARY PHILLIMORE,

AUTHOR OF

'STUDIES IN ITALIAN LITERATURE,' 'THE WARRIOR MEDICI,' 'FRA ANGELICO,'
'SELECTIONS FROM THE SERMONS OF PADRE AGOSTINO DA
MONTEFELTRO,' ETC., ETC.



LONDON
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.
1898.

067.137.5.

To

M. F. S. H.,

WHO ACCOMPANIED THE WRITER

THREE TIMES TO RAVENNA,

THE COMPANION OF MANY STUDIES, RESEARCHES AND TRAVELS,

THESE PAGES

ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

‘E quasi amici dipartirsi pigri.’

Purg., xxxiii. 114.

P R E F A C E .

THE following brief study of the closing years of the life of Dante is offered as a humble contribution to the mass of literature and research which centres in that great name.

Yet in his quiet exile at Ravenna Dante is perhaps not so well known to the student of his life and works as when a citizen of Florence in the early and more stirring periods of his life. But many a passage, both in the 'Divina Commedia' and in his minor works, tends to show how much his mind was influenced by the place of his latest sojourn upon earth.

Frequent visits to the Romagna and Ravenna have enabled the writer, while following in his footsteps, to form some idea of the charm which that part of Italy, and the ancient city itself, must have held for the poet.

Upon the last great Italian work, 'L' Ultimo Rifugio di Dante Alighieri,'¹ which leaves no part of the topography or history connected with that period unexplained or unexplored, the following study relies mainly for its facts. A similar acknowledgment is due to another work, of equal importance, though not so recent, 'Dante e il suo Secolo.'

The study of these works has been supplemented by research among such original sources of information as are to be found in the manuscripts contained in the libraries of Ravenna and Paris, the Bodleian, and the British Museum.

The writer, aware that many points still under dispute have come within the sphere of her labours, is prepared to await, with others, the resifting of all the documents relative to the life and family of Dante in the 'Codice Diplomatico Dantesco,' compiled by the Italian literary authorities, and which last year began to issue in parts from the Italian press. In view of either the ready acceptance of tradition or the negative spirit of modern criticism, the object of this work is to lay a foundation upon which the biography of Dante may securely rest.

¹ 'L' Ultimo Rifugio di Dante Alighieri.' Corrado Ricci, 1891.

'It is time' (such is the prelude of the compilers of the work) 'that under the escort of approved teachers, and following in their steps, the student of Dante should be set in a way from which there is no turning back nor divergence—on the one hand into vague affirmation, on the other into systematic doubt. Such a safe path can only be secured by a careful restatement of facts, and this course of study may be reached from three starting-points :

'1. Renewed attention to the references scattered throughout the works of the poet himself.

'2. The re-investigation of the traditional information supplied by the most reliable of the ancient biographers.

'3. The re-examination of the original documents with which history has from time to time been enriched. A comparison of these last with those cited by the early biographers will show how much is still extant of the original sources of their information. When such documents are lacking, the testimonies of the various early writers will be quoted, and criticism will determine their respective merit according as they can be proved to have written independently of each other.'¹

Such labours as these can hardly miss their mark, and although, in his greatness, Dante may

¹ 'Codice Diplomatico Dantesco : I Documenti della Vita e della Famiglia di Dante Alighieri, riprodotti in facsimile, descritti e illustrati con Monumenti d' Arte, e Figure da Guido Biagi e da G. L. Passerini con gli auspici della Società Dantesca Italiana.'

be looked upon as a citizen of the world, all nations will naturally turn to the land of his birth for the final verdict upon all matters connected with his life and works.

CATHERINE MARY PHILLIMORE.

LONDON,
February, 1898.

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INTRODUCTION.

INTRODUCTION.

*'Avvegna ch'io mi senta
Ben tetragono ai colpi di ventura.'*
Par., xvii. 24.

*'Though I feel me on all sides
Well squared to fortune's blows.'*

IT is probable that the close and persistent study of Dante will be hereafter recognised as one of the prominent features of the nineteenth century, whether it is viewed as an anomaly when set side by side with the prevailing characteristics of the age, or whether it is recognised as a natural reaction from the purely material aims of the latest developments of science. From such aims as these, with all the respect due to the marvellous results which have been achieved, it is yet conceivable that the mind, restless with some unsatisfied instinct, should cast a backward glance over those forgotten paths of learning which converge and centre in their great exponent, Dante, and were reduced by him into the one simple instruction,

'Come l'uom s'eterna.'

In reality, these three words contain at once the subject of Dante's great work and the object for which it was written. The subject, 'the condition of the soul after death'; the object, 'to rescue men from passing their lives in a state of misery, and to direct them in the way of happiness.'

It would almost seem as if in this statement, brief to simplicity, lay the clue to the marvellous influence which the 'Divina Commedia,' ever since it was first penned, has exercised upon the human mind. A little more reflection and the marvel is dispelled, or, rather, resolved into the natural sequence of cause and effect.

Dante was no egotist. Doubtless there floated ever before his mind, throughout his solitary wanderings, the hope that an ungrateful but still ever-loved country would at last recognise his merit, and 'at the font of his baptism'¹ place the coveted laurels upon his head; but this was not the primary motive of his work, nor was that work confined to his own country or to his own time.

Nothing less than the benefit of all who should ever live upon this earth was the design of the writer; therefore, in all countries, without respect to nationality, and, we may now add, in either hemisphere, each succeeding age has claimed a

¹ 'In sul fonte
Del mio Battesimo prenderò 'l cappello.'
Par., xxv. 10.

share in the great inheritance, each has vied with the other in the appreciation of a work which, while it remains the glory of Italy, was not destined to be her inheritance alone ; each in turn has paid its own tribute to the master-mind which comprehended them all, till six centuries have raised a trophy of homage, rarely equalled in the annals of literature, to his name.

From the earliest moment of the existence of the 'Divina Commedia,' when Giotto, under the direct guidance of the author, gave to art the first rendering of the scheme of the poem on the west wall of the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, the student has been able to trace with more or less accuracy the remarkable journey through those imagined spheres which, on account of the splendour of their conception and their precision of detail, have unconsciously supplied for all time a description of the unseen world.

But the study of the present century, not content with soaring after him in spirit, has concentrated itself upon tracing every footprint which he made 'in the body in which I cast a shade.'¹

The great talent of Mr. Gladstone has marshalled the evidence in favour of Dante's visit to Oxford,² and another fruit of diligent research has appeared in a map of Italy³ which indicates every

¹ 'l' corpo, dentro al quale io facev' ombra.'
Purg., iii. 26.

² *Nineteenth Century*, June, 1892.

³ Dante map, by Mary Hensman. Published by Messrs. Nutt, 270, Strand, London, W.C.

spot visited by Dante during his nineteen years of wanderings, till at last he reached the goal of his earthly pilgrimage in Ravenna.

Nowhere could the last footprints of that most remarkable race of life have been more fitly placed than in Ravenna, where the old Roman Empire and the new kingdom of Christianity met, not in opposition, but in harmony. At Ravenna, more, perhaps, than any other spot in the vast world of Rome, the Empire remains indelibly stamped with the sign of Constantine, in the unique glory of basilicas, where the shimmering mosaics, almost as changeless as the stars of heaven, remain as silent witnesses to the fact that there at least the Empire brought with no grudging hand riches and honour to the foot of that Cross in whose might alone, at one crisis of her existence, she had conquered.

To whom could the task of an exponent of the process which had blended into one the two forces of the world be more fitly entrusted than to Dante, and where could he find a grander setting for the completion of the scheme which had occupied his great soul than in Ravenna?

Contemporary history, corroborated by recent research, fixes the epoch of his arrival in Ravenna within a few years of the death of Henry of Luxemburg, in the month of August, 1313. It will be remembered that the sudden death of the Emperor, midway in his career of the conquest of Italy, was likewise the death-blow of the Ghibel-

line hopes, then within an ace of their culmination. Some idea of what that blow must have been to Dante, the prime mover of the Ghibelline party, who had strained every power of his intellect to secure the triumph of the Emperor, may be gathered from the impassioned eloquence of his previous appeal :

‘To all and singular—Princes of Italy, Senators of the Holy City, to every Duke, Marquis, Count, and all the people—I, the humble Italian Dante Alighieri, a Florentine unjustly exiled, send greeting. Behold now is the accepted time, when the signs of consolation and peace are becoming manifest. . . .

‘Rejoice, O Italy, once fit to be the scorn and pity of the Saracens, but now shortly to become the most envied of all nations for thy Bridegroom, who is the light and joy of his century and the glory of thy people, the most gracious Henry—Imperial Cæsar and Augustus hastens to make thee his spouse.

‘Dry thy tears, O beautiful Italy ! Cast away every vestige of grief because he is at hand who will deliver thee from the bonds of thy tormentors, who will strike those murderers, and, destroying them with the edge of the sword, will let out this vineyard to other husbandmen who will render to him the just fruit in due season,’ etc.¹

In a similar strain another letter was addressed to the Emperor himself, written in the actual neighbourhood of Florence, which the hungering

¹ *Opere Minori* (Epist. v. Fraticelli), vol. iii., p. 441.

exile, stimulated by the hope that the end of his banishment was near, had also approached.

In proportion to such high hopes must have been the depth of disappointment in which Dante was obliged to turn away from the 'fair sheep-fold,'¹ and renew his wandering till at last he took refuge in Ravenna, there to find his chief solace in preparing a throne for the dead Emperor in his 'Paradiso,' before which all earthly splendour would fade into insignificance.²

Many and fruitless have been the disputes and discussions as to the exact year which, taking the death of the Emperor in 1313 as a starting-point, witnessed the arrival of Dante in Ravenna. It is not surprising, if we consider the many wanderings of his exiled footsteps, some traced with tolerable certainty, some more faintly indicated by tradition, that almost a literature should centre round this question among the eager biographers of the poet. But that he came there at the request of Guido Novello, as his invited guest, all are agreed. That being the case, he could not arrive there before Guido came into power, the more so as the immediate predecessors of Guido, Bernardino and Lamberto, were earnest Guelphs, striving for the Papal as opposed to the Imperial cause; Bernardino, by whose side Dante had fought at Campaldino, being at that time the

¹ 'Del bello ovile, ov'io dormic agnello.'
Par., xxv. 5.

² 'Par.', xxx. 133-139.

Podestà of Florence, urging the Florentines to resist to the last, and dying in office while the Emperor was at Pisa waiting his opportunity to enter Florence. From this it may safely be assumed that Dante would not select the Court of Bernardino as his refuge in exile. But Guido Novello was still in his first youth, and although his name appears in the early chronicles of Ravenna as the defender of mercantile rights of the city in various disputes with Venice, Chioggia, and Comacchio, he had hitherto kept himself aloof from the great conflict of the age. His disposition was gentle and peaceful, his mind wholly given to study. What little record exists of his life coincides exactly with the portrait left to us by Boccaccio.

‘In those days there reigned over Ravenna, a famous and ancient city of the Romagna, a noble knight called Guido da Polenta, who was instructed in all the liberal arts, who was wont greatly to honour all learned men, especially those who surpassed all others in science.

‘It having reached his ears that Dante (with whose fame he had long been acquainted) was, in this his moment of utmost despair, now in Romagna, he at once prepared to receive and honour him ; nor did he wait to be asked to do so, but with true liberality taking into consideration how hardly a high soul will stoop to ask, he implored him to come to him, asking himself as a special favour, what he knew Dante desired to be asked, whether it would please him to be his guest. The two

wills, that of the host and the guest, thus tending to one issue,¹ and Dante pleased at once with the unqualified liberality of the offer on the one hand, and pressed hard by his own necessities on the other, waiting for no second invitation, betook himself to Ravenna, where Guido received him with every honour, revived his fallen hopes, gave him in abundance all that he needed, and kept him with him in that city for many years, even to the last of his life.²

From this passage we may safely conclude that Dante's arrival in Ravenna cannot have taken place before the accession of Guido Novello to power, and that since his predecessor Lamberto died in June, 1316, and Guido was not elected till October of the same year, Dante would hardly begin his sojourn in Ravenna before the year 1317, an interval of four years having elapsed between the death of the German Emperor and the event in question. That the date cannot be placed later is proved by a curious piece of contemporary evidence. Pietro di Dante, son of Dante, accompanied his father to Ravenna, and there held the two benefices of S. Maria di Zenzanigola and of S. Simone di Muro, the gift of Caterina, wife of Guido Novello. There is a document extant which records the sentence of Pope John XXII.

¹ 'Che del fare e del chieder tra voi due
Fia primo quel, che tra gli altri è più tardo'
(i.e. 'The granting shall forerun the asking').

Par., xvii. 74, 75.

And the compliment by which Dante has immortalized the courtesy of his first host is due in equal measure to his last.

² Boccaccio, 'Vita di Dante,' p. 30.

against Pietro di Dante and others for not having paid the fees due to the Papal Legate, Bertrando del Poggetto, in right of the benefices which they held. Evidently, from this document, Pietro di Dante, together with the other defaulters, had enjoyed the unshorn revenues of these two benefices some little time before the discovery was made, and the fees so long due were replaced by a fine imposed by the angry Legate.¹

We have another testimony which points to the fact of Dante having resided several years at Ravenna in the dates of the poetical correspondence between himself and Giovanni di Virgilio, Cecco d'Ascoli, and others. Various episodes in this correspondence suggest the idea that Ravenna was his permanent residence, that he made excursions from it, but always returned to it.

'Torno a Ravenna, e di lì non parto,' is a line which appears in one of the Eclogues, but these will be referred to at length later on.

So far, then, as it is possible to judge at this distance of time, we may conclude that the exiled life, which found the well-known 'first refuge'² at Verona in 1311, had about four years yet to run when it gently glided into the port of the 'ultimo rifugio' at Ravenna.

¹ 'Ultimo Rifugio,' app., p. 415, doc. ix.

² 'Par.,' xvii. 70.

‘ In quella parte
Di mia età dove ciascun dovrebbe
Calar le vele e raccoglier le sarte.’¹

‘ As to that part
Of life I found me come, when each behoves
To lower sails and gather in the lines.’

CARY, *Trans.*

¹ ‘Inf.,’ xxvii. 77, 80; also ‘Convito Tratt.,’ IV. xxviii.

CHAPTER I.

RAVENNA.

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RAVENNA.

‘Ravenna sta come stata è molt’ anni.’
Inf., xxvii. 40.

‘Ravenna stands as many years she stood.’

BY this single line Dante seems to recall all the glory of the past, and to reinvest the city with the Imperial robe.

For when he entered Ravenna, there, as ever, stood the vast walls on their solid Roman foundation, which, when they ceased to be the last shelter of the failing Empire, had become the chosen centre of the Gothic rule. Many a glorious edifice still remained in untouched splendour to witness to a gigantic past welded out of the ancient power of Rome, supplemented even in the moment of decline by the rude strength of the Romanized Barbarian.

Such were the rich sculptures of the Porta Aurea; the glittering splendour of the Basilica Ursiana, with its five aisles; S. Andrea de’ Goti, said to be a climax of Barbarian effort; the churches built by the Empress Galla Placidia,

Santa Croce and S. Giovanni Evangelista, her votive offerings to the saint whose aid she had invoked in the midst of the raging storm on the treacherous Hadrian Sea. Still the river Padenna flowed through the city, façades of churches adorned with rich porticos, like those of Venice, arose on either side of its course, and beside them stood like some guardian sentinel the round Bell Tower, that characteristic feature of Ravenna.

In the adjoining cemeteries lay the great sarcophagi of the illustrious dead Emperor or Archbishop in the last solemn repose, adorned with those varied emblems of early Christian art which symbolize the Christian's hope. From their midst there rose the sombre majesty of the cypress or the brilliant verdure of the acacia, to break the long lines of slumbering mortality, and, pointing ever towards heaven, suggest to the living citizens the life of the world to come.

Neither tide of river nor of population now animates the silent, grass-grown streets, and some of the great relics of the past have either yielded to the slow decay of centuries or have been rudely swept away by the desolation of civil warfare.

But yet those which remain suffice to give some idea of a past which could never be derived from the pen of the historian alone.

If the bed of a torrent was considered by the warriors of Alaric the Goth to be the only resting-place in Italy worthy of their leader, at Ravenna

one huge rock, raised by the filial piety of Amalassunta, remains to mark the grave of the great Theodoric.

If the Church of S. Andrea de' Goti has perished, yet still the tomb of Galla Placidia in its vicinity preserves the memory of the foundress, and the dark vault of her resting-place is illuminated by a mosaic in such rare preservation as to suggest the glory of the whole design.

If the sea has receded from the port where once the galleys of the Cæsars rode in triumph, still there in the lone waste of the marsh S. Appollinare in Classe remains in solitary splendour on the site of the Roman temple. Columns of shining marble, which once adorned the pagan shrine, have now raised for thirteen centuries the vault where glitters in undimmed splendour the mosaic of the Cross of Christ.

Ever throughout the venerable city, either within or without the walls, in the ancient baptistery, in the twin S. Appollinare, called Nuovo in the fourth century, Santa Maria in Porto, or San Vitale, beautiful as some Eastern dream, church after church repeats the same story, in the same mysterious characters, the same scarcely changing hues.

Now by symbol, now by direct portraiture, they tell of the Good Shepherd, with the sheep of His pasture, of the long row of white-robed martyrs who sealed their faith with their blood, or, pouring his gifts before the altar, of the Emperor whose

effigy from the midst of all the accumulated splendour of marble, alabaster, and mosaic, looks out century after century with the same motionless gaze which probably inspired the lines :

‘Cesare fui e son Giustiniano ;
Che per voler del primo amor ch’ io sento,
D’ entro alle leggi trasse il troppo e ’l vano.’

Par., vi. 10-12.

‘ . . . Cæsar I was,
And am Justinian ; destined by the will
Of that prime love, whose influence I feel,
From vain excess to clear the incumber’d laws.’

CARY, Trans.

Thus Ravenna stood at the close of the traditions of the Empire ; even the last vestige of Imperial power was being merged in the dawning sovereignty of the Popes when Dante the exile arrived before her gates.

Ravenna threw them open to her illustrious guest, and by this act of hospitality coupled her name with his, taking her place by his side on the threshold of the future of Italy.

CHAPTER II.

***THE EAGLE OF POLENTA, THE TYRANTS OF THE
ROMAGNA AND THE POPES CONTEMPORARY WITH
DANTE.***

CHAPTER II.

THE EAGLE OF POLENTA, THE TYRANTS OF THE ROMAGNA, AND THE POPES CONTEMPORARY WITH DANTE.

‘L’ Aquila da Polenta là si cova
Sì che Cervia ricuopre coi suoi Vanni.’
Inf., xxvii. 41, 43.

‘There Polenta’s eagle broods,
And in his broad circumference of plume
O’ershadows Cervia.’

CARY, *Trans.*

‘**I**L GRAN LOMBARDO’ is the name by which Dante has transmitted to posterity the courtesy of Can Grande della Scala, his first host in exile. Still preserving the reference to place which forms such a marked feature in all Italian records, he confers upon Guido Novello the proud title of L’ Aquila da Polenta (The Eagle of Polenta), under whose widespread wings he sought and found a last refuge. The well-known cognizance of the eagle—the ‘Santo Uccello’ of the Emperor, often conceded as a quartering to those who held high office under the Empire—was borne, according to the heraldic historian,¹ with many a variation by the different branches of the Polentani.

¹ ‘Passerini Continuazione Litta Famiglie Celebri,’ i. 461.

Its wings are displayed now on a silver and now on a golden field, but in the shield of Guido Novello the eagle is red and the field gold. The family title was derived from the Castle of Polenta, which stood some thirty miles inland south of Ravenna, and of which only a small fragment remains standing. It would just have been enclosed in the sweep of the eagle's pinion which, including Cesena, covered the port of Cervia.

Following the heraldic imagery, in which the rulers of the Romagna are presented to us in the 'Divina Commedia,' the adjoining city of Forlì, having made a gallant stand against the Pope and his allies, lay then under the talons of the green lion of the Ordelaffi.

'La terra che fè già la lunga pruova,
E di Franceschi sanguinoso mucchio
Sotto le branche verdi si ritruova.'

Inf., xxvii. 33-44.

'The green talons grasp
The land that stood erewhile the proof so long,
And piled in bloody heap the host of France.'

CARY, Trans.

At Rimini the vindictive tyranny of the Malatesta is characterized by the ferocity of a mastiff.

'E 'l Mastin vecchio e 'l nuovo da Verrucchio,
Che fecer di Montagna il mal governo
La dove soglion, fan de' denti succhio.'

Ibid., 45, 46.

‘The old Mastiff of Verrucchio and the young
That tore Montagna in their wrath still make
Where they are wont an auger of their fangs.’

Ibid.

They were Guelphs, and for that reason had murdered Montagna de’ Parcisati, a Riminese noble, for no other reason than that he was a Ghibelline. But the lion’s cub, Mainardo Pagani, who governs the two cities which are watered by the Lamone and the Santerno, *i.e.*, Imola and Forli, is a Guelph at one season of the year, a Ghibelline at another.

‘Le citta di Lamone e di Santerno
Conduce il Leoncel del nido bianco,
Che muta parte dalla state al verno.’

Ibid., 47, 48.

‘Lamone’s city and Santerno’s range
Under the lion of the snowy lair,
Inconstant partisan that changeth sides
Or ever summer yields to winter’s frost.’

And thus they live for ever in the ‘Divina Commedia,’ these mediæval tyrants of the Romagna, for even the boast of their heraldry has been rescued by Dante from the grave.

Like the grim towers which crowned at intervals the embattled walls of the Italian city of those times and protected the citadel, they seem to stand around the nascent temporal power of the Papacy.

For the sovereignty of the triple crown no

longer remained in the lifeless grasp of the puppet which Charlemagne had invested with a semblance of authority to represent the Western Empire and take the place of the discredited government of the Byzantine Court.

Little by little the effigy had come to life, and, as Villemain rhetorically observes, 'wanted to reign.'

Nor would it be satisfied with vague, high-sounding words or phantom dominions.

In the year 1278 all former treaties and concessions which had from time to time been wrested from the Empire were secured by an irrevocable deed. Nicholas III., the Orsini Pope, playing upon the religious fears of Rudolph of Hapsburg, wrung from him the final cession of the exarchate of Ravenna and the fortresses of the Pentapolis, as the price to be paid for the redemption of the Emperor's unfulfilled vow.

It was in vain that Cæsar struggled to retain the 'garden of the Empire,'¹ to which Dante a few years later pathetically recalled him.

The Pope would not let slip the opportunity, and two Acts were signed by the Imperial Ambassador. By the one the Empire renounced all further claim to the fealty of the Romagna; by the other the confines of the States of the Church were defined, and all the cities comprised in them were named one by one, and made over to the Papal authority.

¹ 'Che 'l giardin dell' imperio sia diserto.'

Purg., vi. 105.

Thus it may be seen how the awakened puppet of Charlemagne developed into a living power, which became eventually a giant figure in the scheme of European politics, thundering for no less than five centuries decrees 'Urbi et Orbi,' till at last, within the recollection of the present generation, it has, amid a storm of dispute as to its origin and utility, disappeared from the scene. Dante was many centuries before his time when he condemned this same Orsini Pope, and all the 'miserable followers'¹ of Simon Magus who should succeed him, to lie to all eternity in close proximity to that earth on which they had fixed the gaze which should have been turned towards heaven.

'If'—these are the words he puts into the mouth of Nicholas III.—'thou carest so much to know who I am . . . know that I was vested in the great mantle (of the Papacy), and truly was a son of the she-bear (one of the Orsini), so greedy to advance the bear-cubs that above (in the world) I stowed wealth, and here (in hell) myself in this pouch.²

Then follow prophecies of the yet more atrocious guilt of his successors, Boniface VIII. and Clement V., to which Dante replies with the famous question which strikes at the root of the temporal power :

'Deh or mi di', quanto tesoro volle
Nostro Signore in prima da san Pietro,

¹ 'Inf.', xix. 1.

² *Ibid.*, 70-73.

Che gli ponesse le chiavi in balia ?
 Certo non chiese se non i Viemmi retro
 Nè Pier nè gli altri tolsero a Mattia
 Oro od argento, quando fu sortito
 Al loco che perdè l'anima ria.'

'Pray tell me, now, how much treasure did our Lord require from St. Peter before He put the keys into his charge ? He certainly made no further demand upon him than, "Follow thou Me." Nor did Peter nor the other Apostles extort from Matthias gold or silver, when he was appointed by lot to the post which the guilty soul Judas Iscariot had forfeited.'¹

'Fatto v'avete Dio d'oro e d'argento ;
 E che altro è da voi agl' idolatre
 Se non ch'egli uno, e voi n'orate cento ?'

'Ye have made for yourselves a god of gold and silver, and what other distinction is there between you and the idolaters, except that they adore one thing, and you a hundred of them ?'²

To Nicholas, whose simoniacal conduct gave rise to this burst of righteous indignation, succeeded Martin IV., the Frenchman of Tours, and who does penance in the 'Purgatorio' for his glutton's death,³ whose fierce hatred of the Ghibellines was only foiled at Forli by the craft of Guido da

¹ Vernon's 'Readings on the Inferno,' xix., p. 95.

² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³ 'Purg.,' xxiv. 21-24 :

'Ebbe la santa chiesa in le sue braccia
 Del Torsu fu ; e purga per digiuno
 L'Anguille di Bolsena e la vernaccia.'

Montefeltro, to return a second time with terrible vengeance upon the luckless city.

The short pontificates of Honorius IV. (1285-1287) and Nicholas IV. (1288-1292), which had promised better things, were succeeded by that of Celestine V., whose cowardly desertion of his post has been handed down to posterity in the single line:

‘Che fece per viltade il gran rifiuto.’

Inf. iii. 60.

‘Who, to base fear yielding, abjured his high estate.’

We must admit, however, that, as a matter of history, the anchorite virtues of Pope Celestine V. compare favourably with the opposite vices of his predecessors and successors in the Papal chair.

But the cause of the fierce indignation of Dante, which prompted one of the finest passages in the ‘Inferno,’ as he assigns to Celestine V. a place among the ‘wretches who ne’er lived,’¹ is not far to seek.

The abdication of Celestine was brought about by the combined threats and artifices of his haughty rival, Cardinal Caetani. In abject terror Celestine vacated the Papal throne, thereby making the vacancy so eagerly desired by the ambitious Cardinal, who was forthwith elected to it, and, under the name of Boniface VIII., has left no uncertain record of himself upon the page of history. He claims our attention first as one of the central figures of the ‘Divina Commedia’—

¹ ‘*Inf.*’ iii. 64.

a central figure because of the circumstances which brought him into such close connection with the author as to influence his whole life and work.

But for the embassy from Florence to Boniface VIII., we may reasonably suppose there would have been no exile for Dante, and then, probably, no 'Divina Commedia.'

When selected as the chief of the legation to Rome, to deliberate with the Pope whether or not it would be advisable to invoke the aid of the French arms to settle the quarrels of the opposing factions, Dante was in the prime of his manhood, at the zenith of his reputation.

Boccaccio gives us some idea of the estimation in which he was held in Florence :

'In him was centred the public faith, on him were fastened the people's hopes; in short, he was held to be the only counsellor in all things human and Divine' (Boccaccio, 'Vita di Dante,' pp. 30-32).

'Nor did he,' Boccaccio naively adds, 'think it necessary to set a lower value on his own merits than that universally accorded to him by his contemporaries, as we may judge from his memorable answer (when elected as chief ambassador), "If I go, who remains? If I remain, who goes?"'

When these proud words were uttered, how little did Dante think that he would never again re-enter Florence.

But such was the result of the Embassy. Hardly had the Ambassadors arrived in Rome, than the Pope sent for them into his room to remonstrate with them on their objections to his scheme of summoning Charles of Valois and the French arms to pacify the internal dissensions of Florence.

‘Why are you so obstinate?’ exclaimed the angry Pope. ‘Humble yourselves before me. I tell you truly, I have no other intention but to provide for your peace and welfare. Return two of you to Florence, and my blessing will go with you if you cause my will to be obeyed.’

The two colleagues of Dante—Maso Miner-betti and Corazza, a bitter Guelph—returned to Florence; but Dante, who had always opposed the intervention of the French arms, remained in Rome.

The revolution in Florence which brought in Charles of Valois resulted, not unnaturally, in a severe condemnation of those who had opposed the policy. Dante was not only included in the condemnation of April, 1302, but, on account of his importance to the Republic and his prominent position as a citizen, he had been previously singled out for two special condemnations. In the preceding January of the same year he was prohibited from re-entering Florence under pain of being burnt alive.

These events, the revolution of Charles of Valois, and his own exile, are commented upon in

various passages of the 'Divina Commedia'; but can we wonder that at this period the pen of Dante is dipped in fire as he writes of Boniface, the author not only of his own ruin, but also of that of his country?

Guido da Montefeltro, betrayed by Boniface, is made to describe him as 'Il Principe de' nuovi Farisei' ('Inf.', xxvii. 83), and St. Peter to anathematize, 'Quegli ch' usurpa in terra il luogo mio' ('Par.', xxvii. 21), while condemning point by point the errors of the Papal Government: (1) the fomenting of civil discord—

'Non fu nostra intenzion, ch' a destra mano,
De' nostri successor parte sedesse,
Parte dall' altra, del popol cristiano.'

Par., xxvii. 46, 48.

'No purpose was of ours
That on the right hand of our successors
Part of the Christian people should be set,
And part upon their left.'

(2) the misuse of the keys—

'Ne che le chiavi, che mi fur concesse,
Divenisser, segnacolo in vessillo
Che contra i battezzati combattesse.'

'Nor that the keys,
Which were vouchsafed me, should for ensigns
serve
Unto the banners, that do levy war
On the baptized.'

(3) and of Peter's pence—

'Ne' ch' io fosse figura di sigillo
A privilegii venduti e mendaci,
Ond' io sovente arrosso e disfavillo.'

'Nor I, for sigil-mark
Set upon sold and lying privileges :
Which makes me oft to flicker and turn red.'

CARY, *Trans.*

Yet in spite of this vehement attack, when this same Pope is made prisoner in Anagni, Dante, in strong condemnation of the deed, does not hesitate to use the comparison of Pilate as he describes the insult to the office filled by the vicegerent of our Saviour upon earth.

Boniface VIII. may be taken as the type of the mediæval Pope, and, with all his faults, a certain grandeur can never be dissociated from the figure of the lonely old man who, deserted by all, sat on his throne fully vested in his pontifical robes, with the triple crown on his head, his trembling hands still grasping the golden cross and the keys, emblematic of his office. It was no wonder if, for the moment, even the audacity of the emissaries of Philip of France and the fierceness of the Roman barons were overawed by so exact and living an embodiment of all the current traditions of the Papal power. But for this incident in the records of the time, and the way in which it is handled by Dante, we might never have arrived at the clue to the vexed question how Dante,

being a loyal son of the Church, could allow himself to hand down to posterity branded with infamy six of the Popes who succeeded each other in the chair of St. Peter during his lifetime.¹ Yet one more example is furnished by the forty-days pontificate of Adrian V., who expiates his sin of avarice in the 'Purgatorio,' where he describes how by proof he learnt,

'Come

Pesa il gran manto a chi dal fango 'l guarda ;
Che piuma sembran tutte l'altre some.'²

'With what a weight that robe of sovereignty
Upon his shoulder rests, who from the mire
Would guard it ; that each other fardel seems
But feathers in the balance.'

But although, as we gather from these lines, Dante could form a true estimate of the weight of the Papal mantle of responsibility, he did not believe it to be an impossible feat to keep it unsullied from worldly stain. Instead of being contaminated by the world, his lofty ideal of the Papacy contemplated, on the contrary, a purifying influence, which would be exercised over Christen-

¹ Niccolo III., 1277-1280 ('Inf.', xix. 31).

Martino IV., 1281-1285 ('Inf.', xix. 31).

Celestino V., 1294-1294 ('Inf.', iii. 59, 60).

Bonifazio VIII., 1294-1303 ('Inf.', xix. 53; xxvii. 70; xxxiii. 44. 'Purg.', xx. 87; xxxii. 149; xxxiii. 44. 'Par.', ix. 132; xii. 90; xvii. 49; xxvii. 22; xxx. 148).

Clemente V., 1305-1314 ('Inf.', xix. 82. 'Purg.', xxxii. 15.

'Par.', xvii. 82; xxvii. 59; xxx. 142).

Giovanni XXII., 1316-1334 ('Par.', xxvii. 58).

² 'Purg.', xix. 99, *seq.*

dom at large—a government whose motive should be as lofty as its position was supreme, a sun whose pure and brilliant rays should illuminate the darkness of a dark age, and point the way to eternity.

Could there be a more painful contrast than that presented by the reality?—a reality, moreover, which, instead of improving, only went from bad to worse. For in the succeeding pontificates of Benedict XI., Clement V., and John XXII., it was the lot of Dante to see the Papacy enter upon a yet more degrading phase of its existence, when the Popes, having made themselves the abject slaves of the King of France, were for seventy years his willing captives in Avignon, and to foretell accurately, though under the form of a somewhat gross allegory,¹ the results which Petrarch records in his memorable pictures drawn from life in the modern Babylon.

But to return to the thirteenth century.

The first step of the new suzerain was to claim the homage of his subjects, and, admonished by Papal ambassadors, the Polenta of Ravenna, the Malatesta of Rimini, and Guido da Montefeltro, swore fealty to the Pope instead of to the Emperor, and Papal legates were dispersed throughout the province thereafter designated as the Romagna.

Dante describes its limits:

‘Tra ’l Po, el monte, e la marina e ’l Reno,’²

¹ *Purg.*, xxxii. 156.

² *Ibid.*, xiv. 93.

boundaries which were only probably too familiar to him as he crossed and recrossed the country in his frequent wanderings, till there was hardly a castle or city of any importance that was not known to him, to be recorded each in its turn in the 'Divina Commedia.' Taking into account the natural features of the country and the characteristics of the rulers, no territory, with the exception of Tuscany, has contributed so many episodes to the Poem as the Romagna.

The description of the tyrants forms part of the famous episode of Guido da Montefeltro, and is the answer to the inquiry :

'Dimmi se i Romagnuoli han pace o guerra,'¹

'Tell me if those who in Romagna dwell
Have peace or war,'

at last formulated by the restless, leaping tongue of the flame by which he expiates his fraudulent counsel in the Inferno.

In the Purgatorio, Guido del Duca of Bresciano and Riniero da Calboli of Forlì, clinging together in their blindness, and making the dreary circuit assigned to the envious, enlarge upon the same theme, as they contrast the venomous plants (*venenosì sterpi*) which have now taken root in the Romagna with the noble scions of former generations. 'Always,' to quote Benvenuto da Imola, 'at feud with one another, and, just as bad weeds extirpated by the plough swarm up

¹ Inf., xxvii. 28.

again like the heads of the Hydra, so in the Romagna no amount of good government and legislation would suffice to root out the flagrant abuses that prevailed there.¹

It is to the Romagna also that we owe the greatest of all the episodes of the 'Divina Commedia':

'Siede la terra, dove nata fui,
Su la marina dove 'l Po discende
Per aver pace co' seguaci sui;'

'The land that gave me birth
Is situate on the coast where Po descends
To rest in ocean with his sequent streams,'

is the prelude to the immortal narrative of Francesca da Rimini.

Nor, as we have seen, is the origin of the tragedy on which it is founded far to seek in the cruel, unscrupulous rivalry of the potentates so justly stigmatized by Dante as tyrants.

The favour of the Popes to whom they paid homage gave colour to their pretensions to power, and the sometimes empty title of Vicars of the Archbishops, which gave them importance in the eyes of the people, often led to their being elected podestà, or magistrate, of the city. Then some fortunate conquest would extend the municipal or increase the territorial rights of the State, and the crafty ruler would avail himself of the popular

¹ Vernon's 'Readings on the Purgatorio,' p. 46.

² Inf., v. 97.

enthusiasm of the moment to lay the foundation of absolute, and even hereditary, power.

Step by step this process may be traced in the history of the Polenta family. They are first heard of in the history of Ravenna as Vicars of the Archbishops in the year 1167, next as fulfilling the office of podestà, or magistrate. In the twelfth century the government of Ravenna consisted of a podestà and two consuls; each consul ruled for fifteen days, and was then succeeded by the other consul. At the end of another fifteen days the first consul returned to office.¹ In all these forms of popular government the Polenta took part till they gradually gathered the reins of power into their hands.

In the year 1275 Guido il Vecchio was Podestà of Ravenna, and he won himself great favour in the eyes of the citizens by the acquisition of Cervia from the Papal nominee Stefaneschi, thus considerably extending the territorial influence of Ravenna.

But in order further to strengthen his own position and to subdue completely the people, he invoked the aid of the Malatesta at Rimini.

The tyrants, who had long been at war with each other, united in a common cause against the people. The Malatesta lent a powerful support, and Guido il Vecchio remained firmly fixed in his

¹ The little Republic of San Marino still preserves this elective form of government. Twice every year, on April 1 and October 1, two Captains of the Republic are chosen and invested with six months' authority.

saddle. His daughter, the beautiful Francesca, was destined to reward the valour of his allies. The old Malatesta had two sons. The eldest, Giovanni or Gianciotto, so called because he was deformed and ugly; the youngest, Paolo, endowed with every fascination. But the political ends of Guido il Vecchio and Malatesta da Verrucchio could only be secured by an intermarriage with the eldest son. It was not likely that Francesca, in the prime of her youth and beauty, would consent to this arrangement. So Paolo was sent for to Ravenna, ostensibly to stand proxy for his brother at the marriage, but to the unfortunate bride he was made to appear as her affianced husband. Of the sequel, as Dante was the first narrator so let him be the last, for no one has ever yet succeeded in adding a touch to the unrivalled pathos of her story.¹

Guido il Vecchio, who died in 1310, was succeeded by his son Lamberto, in whose person were combined the offices of Podestà and Consul of Ravenna, thus constituting a position of absolute sovereignty. At the death of Lamberto, Guido Novello, at that time Consul of Cesena, nephew of Guido il Vecchio, son of Ostazio da Polenta, was elected to succeed his uncle, and Cesena became included in the sweep of the wing of the Eagle of Polenta.

¹ Inf., v. 70, *et seq.* Tradition indicates the portrait of Francesca da Rimini to be in the Church of Sta. Maria in Porto fuori at Ravenna, but as there is no proof to support the theory, it only rests on the probabilities suggested by the place, the period of the work, and the extreme beauty of the fresco.

It is a pleasing change to turn from the violence of faction, the struggle for dominion beginning with the two great Powers of the civilized world arrayed against each other in open opposition, thence spreading through every State and city, and marked by vindictive tyranny in every hateful form, to contemplate the brief reign of Guido Novello. His lordship over Ravenna is marked by an open preference for peace and the arts of peace. Early in life he had shown that when necessity arose, and when the welfare of the State was in jeopardy, he could fight as determinedly as any of the tyrants of the Romagna, however much he preferred the cultured society of learned men and the exercise of his own natural gift for poetry. In this light he appears to us as one of the precursors of those lords of the Renaissance who even in the midst of the din of constant warfare could plan the construction of palaces and churches, discuss points of rhetoric or art, and at times could even lay down the sword and take up the pen to write ballads and sonnets.

Such were Lorenzo de' Medici at Florence and Guidobaldo at Urbino in the fifteenth century, but Guido Novello was before his age when he built himself a palace at Ravenna, and invited Dante to be not only his guest, but also his instructor in the arts of rhetoric and poetry.

Of the Camera a Coronis, as the palace is described in the ancient topography of Ravenna,

only the outer wall remains standing, facing the tomb of Dante, and bearing the inscription :

‘Questa Casa
fu in tempo dei Polentani
che ebbero la gloria
Di accogliere ospitalmente
Dante Alighieri.’¹

¹ This house existed in the time of the Polentani, who had the glorious privilege of receiving as their guest Dante Alighieri.—*Trans.*

CHAPTER III.

*DANTE A TEACHER OF RHETORIC IN RAVENNA,
AND 'IL VOLGARE ELOQUIO.'*

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'Qui cominciò a leggere Dante in pria
Retorica Vulgare e molti aperti
Fece di sua Poetica armonia.'

SAVIOZZO DA SIENA : *Rime di M. Cino da
Pistoia e di altri del Secolo*, xiv., p. 575.

ALTHOUGH in the first instance Dante was the invited and honoured guest of Guido Novello, there is sufficient reason to believe that he did not depend for his maintenance upon the hospitality of his patron during the whole of his sojourn at Ravenna—whether or no he actually filled the chair of the Professor of Rhetoric in that city. The probabilities to which the red academical gown of his portraits gives colour in more senses than one are in favour of this honour having been conferred upon him, but the actual historical statement which would make the fact certain is unfortunately lacking. Schools of grammar and rhetoric since the reign of Theodosius are known to have existed in Ravenna. The first authentic notice of such schools being

extant dates from the sixth century, and rests on the testimony of Procopius, the historian of Justinian, with reference to Vincenzo Fortunato, at that time a celebrated rhetorician.

There, under the shadow of the great Emperor Justinian, civil jurisprudence was digested for the use of all succeeding generations in the immortal works of the 'Code,' the 'Pandects,' and the 'Institutes.'

Long before the University of Bologna received her title of *Mater Studiorum*, the great traditions of the Emperor and his famous code were handed down in the schools of Ravenna from rhetorician to rhetorician, as from time to time they shed the light of their learning upon the dense horizon of the Dark Ages.

These schools, which had received the support of the Eastern Empire, continued to flourish under the Exarchate, the Longobardi, and the Ravennese Bishops who represented the Papal power.

The record of those who held the office of public lecturer appears to date from 1268, when Pasio della Noce was summoned by the Senate to give lectures on jurisprudence in Ravenna. In 1298, when Dante was reaching the zenith of his power in Florence, Ugo di Riccio was *juris civilis professis* in Ravenna.

Six years afterwards, 1304 (Dante had by that time been three years in exile), there is another record of one Leone da Verona, who received a

salary of 25 lire Ravagnane to teach grammar and logic to the Ravennese youth.

The next notice, bearing date 1333, twelve years after the death of Dante, is of one Giovanni Giacomo del Bando, who went from Cesena to Ravenna to teach logic, medicine, philosophy, and astronomy. There is no actual historical record that, in the interval, when no other name is mentioned, Dante occupied the rhetoric chair during the four years of his sojourn at Ravenna, and this throws us back upon the probabilities in favour of his having done so. We have gathered from the historical notices that such a chair was in existence, and that the Ravennese had been at some pains to have it worthily filled. What is more likely than that Guido Novello, himself a scholar, and with a profound admiration for Dante, should have seized the opportunity to procure both for himself and his city the advantage of so unrivalled an instructor?

These probabilities must, of course, be taken at their own value, but there is also contemporary testimony which adds weight to the supposition.

Boccaccio notes that Dante in Ravenna had many scholars in poetry, and particularly *nella volgare*. Saviozzo da Siena follows and amplifies Boccaccio's statement.

‘Qui cominciò a leggere Dante in pria
Retorica Vulgare e molti aperti
Fece di sua Poetica armonia.’¹

¹ ‘Rime di M. Cino da Pistoia e di altri del Sec.’ xiv., p. 575
(date 1396-1459).

Manetti, one of the early biographers of Dante, supports the theory; but the most conclusive evidence rests on a codex in the Laurentian library, cited by Bandini, which states:

'It is commonly reported that Dante, being studying in Ravenna, and giving lectures as a Doctor to his pupils upon various works, the schools became the resort of many learned men.'¹

This would coincide with the statement by Boccaccio, that many doctors of science attended the funeral of Dante.

One of his minor works, entitled 'Il Volgare Eloquio,' is supposed to have formed the subject of his lectures to his pupils at Ravenna.

It seems that up to the fifteenth century the 'Volgare Eloquio' had never been read in Italy. The first edition we owe to Gian Giorgio Trissino, who made a faithful translation from the original Latin into Italian, and under the pseudonym of Giovan Battista Doria dedicated it to the Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici. For a long time, even up to the present day, it was supposed that Trissino had himself fabricated the treatise, and passed it under the name of Dante; but the discovery of fourteenth-century MSS., notably that of Grenoble, which has been recently reproduced (1892), has put an end to any such supposition, even if the evidence of contemporary history, to say nothing

¹ 'Ult. Rif.' p. 83.

of the internal evidence, did not suffice to assign the work to Dante himself.

Some have tried to determine the date of the book by internal evidence with reference to historical personages¹ who are referred to as still living when the book was composed, and have therefore fixed its completion in 1306, making it antecedent to the ‘Divina Commedia.’ Boccaccio and Villani, on the other hand, will be seen rather to lean to the idea that it was one of the poet’s later compositions. But in either case there is nothing to militate against the supposition that it formed the substance of his lectures at Ravenna.

That Dante had the intention of writing such a book we have on his own authority: ‘Upon this matter (*i.e.*, the different dialects of Italy) I propose to treat at greater length in a book which, God willing, I intend to write upon the Vulgar Tongue.’²

Boccaccio, his contemporary, and Villani, a few years later on, testify to the fulfilment of his promise :

‘Moreover, Dante wrote a book which he entitled “De Vulgare Eloquio,” which he proposed to divide into four parts, but only two are extant (perhaps on account of his sudden death), in the which in masterly and polished Latin he reproves all the vulgar dialects of Italy.’³

¹ Azzo d’ Este, Marchese, lib. i., c. xii. ; lib. ii., c. vi.

² ‘Convito Tratt.’ I., c. v., p. 73.

³ Boccaccio, ‘Vita di Dante.’

‘And about this time, already within a few years of his death, Dante composed a book in Latin prose, which he entitled “*De Vulgare Eloquentia*,” and, as it is set forth in this book,¹ his intention was to divide it into four distinct parts.

‘Either because his labours were cut short by death, or because two of the books have been lost, only two are still extant.’

If, as most of the earliest biographers maintain, the loss of the two last books is due to the sudden death of the author, we may indulge ourselves in the belief that the two which remain constitute the lectures which, either in the public chair of rhetoric or in his private house, Dante gave to his pupils at Ravenna.

The design of the book was to construct out of the fourteen ancient dialects of Italy an idiom which, for beauty and sweetness and efficacy, should equal the ancient Latin, and should be universally employed throughout Italy as the organ of the expression of Italian thought. Dante was the first to whom such an idea occurred.

‘Being unable to find,’ so the book opens, ‘that any-one has ever before attempted a treatise on the vulgar tongue, and perceiving that the knowledge of this vulgar tongue is indispensable to all, as not only men, but women and children, so far as they are able, try to avail themselves of it, and wishing to enlighten the judgment of those who, like the blind, grope about the streets, and many times misplace the order of things, supposing that

¹ Villani, lib. ix., c. cxxxvi.

which is behind to be in front. With that help which God sends to us from above, we propose to facilitate the speech of the common people. Nor will we merely draw from the sources of our own intellect the water wherewith to slake our thirst, but, further, taking from other sources the best of their kind, we will mix the two together in order to produce a decoction of the sweetest Hydromel.’¹

The use of the plural in this opening sentence, and on many occasions throughout the book, rather suggests that the original form of this treatise must have been a lecture in which the lecturer invokes the assistance of his hearers to elucidate his subject, as Dante describes with his usual felicitous touch in the ‘Paradiso’:

‘Come discente, ch’ a dottor seconda
 Pronto e libente in quello ch’ egli è sperto
 Perchè la sua bontà si disasconda.’

Par., xxv. 64-66.

‘Like to the scholar, practised in his task,
 Who willing to give proof of diligence
 Seconds his teacher gladly.’

The origin of language occupies the first five chapters of the book. The sixth chapter enters upon a quaint dissertation as to the language of mankind before the building of the Tower of Babel, *i.e.* :

¹ ‘Il Volgare Eloquio,’ lib. i., c. i.

‘The form of speech used by the man who was born without a mother was never nourished with his mother’s milk, and never saw childhood nor youth.¹

‘Should anyone exist so prejudiced in judgment as to imagine that his own country is the most favoured spot in the world, to him it must by a necessary consequence appear that his own mother-tongue must be superior to any other language, and thence he would infer that his mother-tongue must have been the language used by Adam. . . .

‘But to us to whom the world is our country, as the sea is to the fishes, although we have drunk the waters of the Arno before ever we cut our teeth, and who love Florence so much that because of our love for her we are now suffering an unjust exile—nevertheless our judgment shall lean rather upon reason than upon the affections ; and therefore, although for our own preference and to satisfy our own longings there is no spot on earth more delightful than Florence, yet, on turning over the volume of the Poets and other writers by whom the world both in general and in particular is described, and taking into consideration the various parts of the world, and the different manners and customs between the two Poles and the Equator, we believe and understand that there are many regions and cities more noble and more delightful than Tuscany and Florence, where I was born, of which I am a citizen, and many nations and many people use a more agreeable and more useful form of language than the Italians. Returning, therefore, to my premise, I maintain that a certain form of speech was created by God together with the creation of the first soul. When I say form, I mean with regard to a vocabulary of words,

¹ Compare ‘Par.,’ vii. 26 :
‘Quell’ uom che non nacque.’

the construction of the vocabulary, and the order of the construction, the which form was used by everybody who could speak . . . that with this form Adam spoke, and all his posterity, up to the time of the Tower of Babel, which may be interpreted the tower of confusion. This form of speech was inherited by the sons of Heber—called after him Hebrews—to whom their language remained intact after the general confusion, in order that our Redeemer, who was to be born of that nation, might, when He spoke, according to His manhood employ the language of grace, and not of confusion.

‘It was the Hebrew idiom which was uttered by the lips of the first man who ever spoke in this world.’¹

This idea was afterwards relinquished by Dante, as in the ‘Paradiso’ he puts these words into the mouth of Adam :

‘La lingua ch’ io parlai fu tutta spenta
 Innanzi che all’ ovra inconsuabile
 Fosse la gente di Nembrotte attenta.’

Par., xxvi. 124-126.

‘The language I did use
 Was worn away or ever Nimrod’s race
 Their unaccomplishable work began.’

But the misconception was, as we know, held by many generations, and supported by scholarly and religious minds of the highest order. Although it has been since corrected by philological discoveries which have established the relationship between Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, and other ancient

¹ ‘Il Volgare Eloquio,’ lib. i., c. vi., pp. 154, 155.

tongues, the oldest form of human speech still remains lost in the darkness of antiquity. But ever since the time of Dante the effort to recover it has been made again and again, for, as it has been truly said by one of the most modern writers upon the subject :

‘ Humanity turns with a natural tenderness and reverence towards any details respecting the first Parents of Mankind, therefore it is not surprising to find that many attempts have been made to discover which of the ancient tongues was the one original speech of Adam and Eve. All such philological efforts have been necessarily futile, for the account given in Genesis of the calamity at Babel shows that it took the shape of a supernatural seizure, which immediately destroyed the common language and permanently dislocated the articulation of the people by confusing its normal action and dispersing its unity, like the sudden volcanic disturbance of a river-bed, resulting in ‘a separation and a scattering of one mighty stream into new and innumerable channels.’¹

Chapter vii., with many a characteristic touch, describes the building of the Tower of Babel, and leads up to the climax in the confounding for ever of the human speech. Dante follows Josephus² when he interprets the word ‘Babel’ to mean confusion, and in attributing the suggestion of the tower which was to reach to heaven to Nimrod.

¹ ‘The Speech of Man and Holy Writ,’ p. 58.

² ‘Antiq. Jud.,’ lib. i., c. iv.

‘Per lo cui mal coto,
Pur un linguaggio nel mondo non usa.’

Inf., xxxi. 77, 78.

‘Through whose ill-counsel in the world no more
One tongue prevails.’

The semi-Scriptural, semi-mythological, gigantic personality of Nimrod is well known to all readers of the ‘Inferno’:

‘La faccia sua mi parea lunga e grossa
Come la pina di San Pietro a Roma ;
Ed a sua proporzione eran l’ altre ossa.’

Ibid., 58-60.

‘His visage seemed
In length and bulk as doth the pine that tops
Saint Peter’s Roman fane.’

The jargon which he shouts forth as Dante and Virgil approach is meant to furnish a travesty of each one of the three languages of Southern Europe—Italian, French, and Spanish :

Raphel mai	amech	zabi almi.
or		
Rè fello mai (Italian)	aimoyt (French)	sabias almas. (Spanish)

A bad king never loves wise men, or sages, sages being the term always applied by Dante to the poets.

These three great groups of language, distin-

guished by their affirmatives of 'oc,' 'oil,' and 'sì,' are derived, Dante supposes, from one common source, because in the description of certain things the three nations employ the same vocabulary, as, for example, in the words 'Dio,' 'cielo,' 'amore,' 'mare,' 'terra,' 'vive,' 'muore,' 'amare,' and many others. Here we find resolved into a nutshell the great achievement of modern science, so that Dante may be looked upon as the father of the comparative philology which rests on this principle.

We find this theory pursued more closely in chapter ix., where, taking the single example of the word 'amor,' he cites from three selected masters in each of the languages of 'oc,' 'oil,' and 'sì,' Gerardo di Borneil, the King of Navarre, and Guido Guinicelli, to prove the use of the word.

'Let us investigate,' Dante continues, 'how the variations may principally be classed under three heads, and why each of these variations is also variable—why, for example, the right side of Italy has a different form of speech to the left, why the Paduans should speak differently to the Pisans, and why, moreover, those who live in close neighbourhood, like the Milanese and the inhabitants of Verona, the Romans and the Florentines; why, again, should the form of speech vary between those who belong to the same race, like the Neapolitans and the Gaetani, the Ravennese and the inhabitants of Faenza; and, what is perhaps the most marvellous of all, why those who dwell in the same city cannot agree upon

the same form of speech—as, for example, the Bolognese of Borgo San Felice and the Bolognese of the City. All these differences and varieties of speech can be attributed to one cause.¹

The cause is traced back with some elaboration to his original idea of the confusion of the Tower of Babel, and the oblivion of the first form of speech, which afterwards became altered and corrupt.

‘And man being ever unstable and variable, his form of speech could never continue settled and fixed, but, like everything else, was subject to the changes of time and place, till at last there appeared the inventors of the art of grammar, which is nothing less than an unalterable conformity of speech at different times and in different places.’²

The grammarians having decided to take ‘sì’ for an adverb of affirmation, Dante concludes from this that the Italian language derives a certain authority over the other two languages, although it is very difficult to decide between the three, as all are supported by a great weight of testimony.

It may be urged, he argues in favour of the language of ‘oil,’ that on account of the facility and sweetness of its dialect it contains all the translations that have been either found or rendered into the vulgar tongue, such as the books containing the accounts of the Trojans and

¹ Lib. i., c. ix., p. 163.

² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

the Romans,¹ the beautiful romance of King Arthur, and many other legends and books of learning.

The language of 'oc,' on the other hand, has to rest its claim for distinction upon the fact that it was the language employed by the most eloquent writers in the vulgar tongue for their first poems, such as Piero di Avernia, and many other ancient writers, as the most perfect and the sweetest form of language.

The third, that is, the Italian language, claims the superiority on two grounds: The first, that those who have written the most graceful, polished poetry were familiar and intimate with it. Such were Cino da Pistoja and 'his friend.'² The second reason, that it keeps the closest to the grammar which is common to all.

Leaving the decision of this knotty point to others, Dante returns to his treatise on the *lingua volgare*, discussing the variations which occur in it, and comparing them one with another.

First of all he states that Italy is divided into two parts: the right hand and the left hand.

'Should anyone ask what is the line of division, I briefly reply, the yoke of the Apennines³—on the right

¹ In Trissino's translation the Latin original has been wrongly rendered, 'Biblia cum Trojanorum Romanumque gestibus' being translated 'La Bibbia, I fatti dei Troiani e Romani,' whereas it signifies 'i libri che contengono i fatti de' Troiani e de' Romani.'

² By whom Dante means himself (cx., p. 167).

When Dante speaks of the yoke of the Apennines, he includes the whole chain of the Alps, following the terminology of Lucan in

hand lie the regions of La Puglia (but not all of it), Rome, the Duchy (Urbino), Tuscany, and the Marches

his 'Pharsalia.'* It will be remembered that Lucan was the last of the four great shades of the poets who advanced to greet him and Virgil when they made their entrance into Limbo :

'L' ultimo è Lucano.'

Inf., iv., p. 90.

* Lucan, 'Pharsalia,' book ii. :
 'Retreating Pompey with his trembling band
 At Trojan walls of Capua took his stand,
 His chosen seat of war. Here he intends
 'Gainst the great foe to range his scattered friends.
 Where Apennine through wooded hills her peaks
 Ridge upon ridge uplifts, and closer seeks
 The heights of heaven, midmost Italian crest,
 High swelling o'er all foreign heights confessed,
 A chain which stretches 'twixt our twofold main,
 Lower and higher. Pisa doth contain
 Those Western hills, the Tuscan waters' shore ;
 Ancon the East, where waves Dalmatian roar.
 Here bounteous springs give birth to rivers vast
 Which towards either sea dividing haste.
 Left fall the Lakes, Crustumium fierce, Metaurus,
 Senna, Isapis, joined to Isaurus,
 And Orfidus, which smites th' Hadrian Sea,
 And that Eridanus, than which there be
 No greater earth despouiler, melting soils,
 Sucking lands dry, bearing off forest spoils.
 First said to crown his banks with poplar shade,
 When Phaethon, from western course once strayed
 Kindled the air with red-hot scorching rein ;
 And all the fountains from burnt earth were ta'en ;
 This flood alone had waves which could the fire restrain.
 Not less than Nile. But Nile through Afric's sand
 Expands o'er Egypt's flat and sluggish sand.
 Not less than Danube. If his devious course
 Half through the world withdrew not from each source
 Waters that help him feed the sea with foreign force
 The rainfall forms, as slopes the right-hand side,
 Tiber and hollow Rutuba ; thence glide
 Volturn the swift ; Sarnus, the night fog's cause ;
 Lyrus, whose wooded bed the stream withdraws
 From Vestines to Marica. Siler's way
 Which bounds Salurnum. Macra, on whom stay
 No carvels, till she stretch to Luna's neighb'ring bay.
 Longer the chain than country ; for her spine

of Genoa ; on the left hand lie La Puglia (the rest of it), La Marca d' Ancona, La Romagna, La Lombardia, La Marca Trivigiana, and Venice. In truth, Il Friuli and Istria cannot but belong to the left side of Italy, just as the islands of the Tyrrhenian Sea—that is to say, Sicily and Sardinia, including Corsica—must be included in the right side. On either side, and in all these parts which are thus included, and even in each city, as we have already said, we find some variation of speech ; so that if we care to calculate the first and the second and all the subdivisions of the vulgar tongue in Italy, we find that in that small corner of the world alone there may be even more than a thousand or more variations of speech.'

Many of these Dante proceeds to show in the next chapter are discordant and bad, and that, like trees which have fallen across the road, or thorns which obstruct the path, they must be cast out of the author's way as he patiently plods along the difficult path of investigation. Such are the Roman dialect, which, to our surprise, we learn was then 'il più brutto di tutto,' also those of Ancona and Spoleto.

Next, those of Milano and Bergamo are passed

Rises to Gallic fields, where Alps incline.
 Fruitful to Umbrian, Marsian, Sabine field,
 Well tilled, embracing as with pinous shield
 The earth-born Latin tribes. Nor yet it leaves
 Italian bounds, till closed with Scylla's caves,
 Or western rocks, Lacinian Juno's fane.
 Longer than Italy, until the main
 Loosen'd its bond with blows and floods rolled back again.
 But since the double sea the land o'ercame
 Its last cliffs to Pelorus yield their name.'

WALTER G. F. PHILLIMORE.

through the sieve, the harsh accents of the Aquilejan and the Istrian, and all the patois of the mountains and villages which offend the ears of the citizen. Such, for example, are the Casentini and the Pratesi. The Sardinians, who do not really belong to Italy, but have only been included in the category, are next cast to the winds.

What, then, remains for comparison after this vigorous sifting of the dialects of Italy? Which of those, asks Dante, that now remain in the sieve¹ is the most to be esteemed? Be it understood then that, to the shame of the other princes of Italy, the palm of minstrelsy belongs to Sicily and to her illustrious heroes, such as

¹ Evidently following in the footsteps of Dante, a sieve—or, strictly speaking, a bolting-cloth, because used for separating the wheat from the bran—became the device of the Accademia della Crusca, and its motto 'Il più bel fior ne coglie' ('It gathers the finest flour'). The metaphor was kept up by the names of the members, as, for example, Tasso's critical and literary assailants, Leonardo Salviati and Bastiano de' Rossi, were called *Lo Infarinatedo* (Mealy) and *Lo Inferigno* (Brown Bread). These entitled their first criticism 'a sifting,' and it opened as follows: 'Our Academy, which has taken, as we know, the title of the Bolting-Cloth, because it bolts the flour presented to it from time to time, that it may separate off the bran, being assembled in full conclave according to custom at their dwelling; and having learned from their steward that a little bag of flour had just been left to be passed through the sieve, gave orders that it should be brought before them by their bailiff's servants. Having read in the ticket stitched upon it the name of Camillo Pellegrino, they had the mouth of the bag untied, and when the judges had examined it, they ordered their factor immediately to take the measure and the weight, and to register both, together with the ticket, on their book of accounts. No sooner said than done; and by order of the Arch-Consul (this was the title of the President of the Academy) the flour was speedily sifted through the boulter, and the bran separated from it.'—Milman's 'Life of Tasso,' vol. ii., pp. 69, 70.

'Imperial Frederick and Manfred, his well-nurtured son,¹ who, while fortune favoured them, followed the higher path, and disdained to copy the examples of bestial tyranny around them. Therefore those who were of lofty soul and gifted with every grace attached themselves to these great princes in their majesty, so that in that time poetical compositions of the best writers in Italy first appeared in their Court. And because their regal Court was held in Sicily, it fell out that all which our predecessors composed in the vulgar tongue was called Sicilian: this we maintain, and it can never be altered by our posterity.'²

'Yet,' he adds, 'as this is not the language of the majority of the people, but only of the cultivated writers of the Court, it cannot be said that the Sicilian or the Puglian is the most beautiful of the Italian dialects.'

Chapter xiii. addresses itself to the Tuscans, who arrogantly boast that theirs is the *volgare illustre* of Italy, and are unhesitatingly condemned, together with the Pisans, Lucchesi, Sienesi, and Aretini, as obstinate in their ugly dialect, and therefore not amongst them can the vulgar tongue be found in its excellence, although the Tuscan writers, Guido, Lapo, and one other Florentine besides, Cino da Pistoja, are fully cognisant of how to render it in its excellence.

As to the Genoese, they are dismissed with the ironical remark that if by chance they forget to pronounce the letter *z*, they may as well give up the point of speech altogether, as the *z* constitutes

¹ 'Purg.', iii. 105.

² V. E., xii. 175.

the main element of their speech, a letter which can never be pronounced without an ugly aspirate.¹

Passing over the wooded sides of the Apennines, which suggest the beautiful oak glades of the old forest of the Marziana, Dante begins the investigation of the dialect of the Romagna, with which his long residence in the country made him fully acquainted. There, indeed, he finds two distinct forms of dialect, the one essentially feminine from the softness of the vowels and the pronunciation, especially in Forlì and the neighbourhood; the other form harsh and rough in its vowels and accent, which, on account of its asperity if used by a woman, would be so unnatural to her that it would make you wonder if it was not a man who was speaking. Such are all who make use of the word 'magara,' Bresciani, Veronesi, Nicentini, and even the Paduans, who render the participles in 'tus' and denominatives in 'tas' with an ugly syncope as 'marcò' and 'cortì.' To this group belong the Trevisani, who, after the fashion of the Bresciani and the neighbourhood, exchange the *f* for a *v*, removing the last syllable, as, for example, 'nov' for 'nove,' 'vif' for 'vivo,' which is in truth most barbarous.

As for the Venetians, they are dismissed as unworthy even of the honour of investigation.

Chapter xiv. is devoted to the discussion of the Bolognese dialect, and they are not far wrong, the author tells us, who have pronounced in its

¹ V. E., xiii. 181.

favour, although the Bolognese have borrowed something from Imola, Ferrara, and Modena, and have thus added to their own dialect ; but this, as we have seen, is not an uncommon proceeding, as Sordello tells us of his Mantua, which is bounded by Cremona, Brescia, and Verona. This man was so eloquent that not only in his poems, but even in his ordinary method of speech, he discarded the simple use of his mother-tongue.¹

In the same way the Bolognese citizens have borrowed a sweetness from Imola, and from Ferrara and Modena a certain loquacity which is proper to the Lombard. This characteristic has remained with them, owing to the mixture of the Longobardian foreigners, and this is the reason why neither Ferrara (Ariosto was yet to be born), Modena, nor Reggio have supplied a poet—because, infatuated with their own loquacity, they could never attain without a certain asperity of diction to the cultivated *volgare* of the Court.

As, then, the Bolognese have borrowed from this side and from that, it is a natural result that their language should remain tempered by a mixture of opposite characteristics with a praiseworthy sweetness. But yet, if it had been a perfect dialect, neither Guido Guinicelli, Guido Ghislero, Fabrizio, and Onesto, nor the other poets, would have departed from it, for they are illustrious in learning, and with a perfect knowledge of the vulgar dialects.

¹ See 'Purg.,' vi. 74.

The result of all these researches and elaborate descriptions is to prove that, as not one among all the Italian dialects is worthy to be exalted sufficiently above the others to give it a claim to be that one noble Italian language in which all the learned and cultivated people of Italy should converse and unite, it remains that a language should be constructed worthy of the Court and of the Senate, which should appertain to all the cities of Italy, and not to one alone.¹ This language, this vulgar tongue, in its perfection should have four characteristic qualities. It should be noble (*illustre*), cardinal (*cardinale*), stately (*aulico*), of the Court, and *cortigiano*, which means judicial or forensic, belonging to the courts of law. Noble or illustrious, because both illuminated and illuminating, it should shine.

Why, he argues, are men called illustrious? Because, illuminated with power, they are wont with justice and charity to illuminate others; or, again, excellently instructed, they can in their turn excellently instruct. Such were Seneca and Numa Pompilius. The vulgar tongue of which we speak, being exalted with learning and power, should exalt those who use it to honour and glory.

That it is exalted by learning we can perceive for ourselves, when, freed from so many rough

¹ Chapter xvi. :

'Dello eccellente parlar
Volgare il quale è comune a tutti gli Italiani.'

dialects, so many perplexities of construction, so many deficiencies of pronunciation, so much village jargon, it can become perfect and elegant when employed by such poets as Cino da Pistoja and 'his friend.'

That it becomes exalted with power is easy to prove ; for

' What is a greater power than that which can turn a man's heart so as to make him wish who did not wish, and he who willed not to will, as this language in its noble form has done and does? That it raises to honour those who are gifted with it is very evident. Do not its disciples surpass in fame all the great ones of the earth, King, Marquis, or Count? Of that there is no need of proof ; and that it makes its followers glorious we ourselves have experienced, as on account of this glory we are able to cast our exile behind us. Then, certainly it deserves to be called illustrious.¹

' Not without reason do we bestow the second epithet of "cardinal" upon it, because, as the door follows the hinge whether it turns inside or outside, so do all the multitude of dialects of the cities turn and return, move and remain still, in accordance with the *volgare illustre*; or courtly (*aulico*), or of the Court, because, if the Italians had a Court, the language would reign there as County Palatine, it being of necessity that all who reside in a Court should speak the *volgare illustre*, or language of the Court. Having no Court, it has ensued that our *volgare illustre* seeks refuge as a wanderer, now in this lonely dwelling and now in that, having no abode worthy of it.

¹ Chapter xvii., p. 191.

‘Finally, it is called forensic or judicial, because it serves as a measured rule for the things which have to be done; and as the accurate measure is only to be found in the most excellent court (of justice), it happens that all that which is well weighed in our actions and conformable to the law may be termed forensic, or judicial.

‘This language, then, which should be at once illustrious, cardinal, stately and judicial, we declare to be the *volgare Italiano*.¹

Here ends the first book, perhaps the most important of the two, because it lays before us, down to every quaint detail, the dialects of Italy in the untutored rudeness of the Middle Age.

In the second book we find the great master of the language, pen in hand,² diligently at work upon his elaborate and self-imposed task. That ‘*Il Volgare Italiano illustre*’ is adapted alike for verse and prose is his first axiom. But as those who write in prose are wont to model their language upon that employed by the troubadours, it is well to examine whether all who write in verse are entitled to the use of this polished style. It is only properly employed by men of science and intellect, because it should be reserved for the expression of noble ideas and noble themes, of which such men alone can be the originating source. It does not belong to the rough and common herd

¹ Chapter xix., lib. i.

² ‘Ritoraldo al calamo della utile opera,’ lib. ii., c. i.

of versifiers, of whom there are many, who make verses without either science or intellect. And as without science or intellect the mind must be barren of noble themes for verse, so, Dante argues, this stately style is not for them.

‘And when it is argued that each poet should adorn his verse as much as possible, we admit that to be true, but, at the same time, if we saw an ox in a saddle with housings, or a pig girt with a sash, we should not think either of them adorned ; but, on the contrary, that their ugliness was only further enhanced, ornament being nothing else than the addition of something befitting the object to be adorned. Again, to those who urge that the combining of the inferior with the superior will produce perfection, I reply that is also true when the two commingle and do not remain separate. As, for example, if gold and silver were blended together, but if the two parts remain separate, then the inferior, by comparison with the superior element, only appears more vile. Therefore, if the theme for versification does not lend itself to the words, instead of being enhanced by an ornate style, its unworthiness is only the more accentuated, just as an ugly woman appears to worse advantage when bedizened in silk and gold.’¹

The question naturally follows as to what are fitting subjects for the *volgare illustre*, which, ‘being in itself excellent, can only treat of things excellent.’ These are resolved by the author under three heads, briefly stated : Feats of Arms, Love,

¹ Lib. ii., c. i., pp. 189, 190.

and Righteousness. All have been treated by the great poets of the day, and examples are cited as to feats of arms from the Gascon warrior troubadour Beltram di Bornio,¹ as to love from Arnaldo Daniello,² as to righteousness Gerardo di Borniello. Again, of love, Cino da Pistoja; again, of righteousness, the ‘friend of Cino da Pistoja’ (*i.e.*, Dante).

‘As yet, so far as I know,’ Dante concludes, ‘no Italian has sung of arms.’

It was not long, however, before Boccaccio took up this challenge, and supplied the deficiency in his ‘Teseide,’ *i.e.*, Duke Theseus against the Amazons, whence Chaucer borrowed in part his ‘Knight’s Tale.’ He plumes himself on having filled the vacant place in the eighty-fourth stanza of the last book of the poem.

‘But thou, O Book! be thou the first to tell
 Of feats of Mars; how warriors fought and fell
 In vulgar parlance of the Latium tongue—
 Deeds that till now remained unknown, unsung;
 And as thou art the first whose keel will leap
 Through the wide waste of trackless waters deep,
 Ploughing through waves that ne’er were ploughed be-
 fore,

¹ ‘Sappi ch’ io son Beltramo dal Bornio, quelli
 Che al Rè giovane diede i mai conforti.’
Inf., xxviii. 134, 135.

² ‘Li dolci detti vostri
 Che quanto durerà l’ uso moderno
 Faranno cari ancora i loro inchiostri.’
Purg., xxvi. 112-115.

Thou in all lowness mayst pass them o'er,
 And from the novel subject of thy lays
 Mayst share with others honour, fame and praise.¹

Of the five illustrations drawn from the writers of the time,² we select a few of the verses by Guido Guinizzelli, justly honoured by Dante as the father of Tuscan rhyme, on account of their perfection both as to manner and matter:

‘Al cor gentil ripara sempre amore,
 Siccome augello in selva la verdura :
 Non fu Amore anzi che gentil core,
 Nè gentil core anzi ch’ Amor, Natura :
 Ch’ adesso come fu ’l Sole,
 Si tosto lo splendore fue lucente ;
 Nè fu davanti al Sole :
 E prende Amore in gentilezza loco,
 Così propriamente,
 Com, il calore in clarità del foco.

‘Fuoco d’Amore in gentil core s’ apprende,
 Come vertute in pietra preziosa,
 Che dalla stella valor non discende,
 Anzi ch’l Sol la faccia gentil cosa ;
 Poi chè n’ha tratto fuore
 Per la sua forza il Sol ciò, che gli è vile,
 La Stella i dà valore :
 Così lo cuor, che fatto è da natura
 Schietto, pur, gentile,
 Donna a guisa dí Stella lo’ nnamora.

¹ ‘La Teseide,’ lib. iv., 84.

² V. E., lib. ii., c. v., 215.

' Amor per tal ragion sta in cor gentile,
 Per qual lo foco in cima del doppiero ;
 Splende al suo diletto, clar, sottile,
 Non gli staria altra guisa tanto è fiero :
 Però prava natura
 Incontr' a amor fa come l'aigua al fuoco,
 Caldo per la freddura :
 Amore in gentil core prende rivera ;
 Perocchi simil luoco ;
 Come adamas del ferro in la minera,' etc.¹

Translation.

' Like as the birds to depths of sylvan grove,
 So to the gentle soul comes hastening love ;
 Nor without gentle soul can such love be,
 Nor without love the soul's gentility.
 Swift as the sun appears with glitt'ring ray,
 So swiftly Nature dons her mantle gay ;
 Nor was her splendour previous to the sun.
 Thus blend the gentle soul and love in one,
 So of necessity
 Must heat by clearest flame engendered be.
 ' Fire of love pertains to gentle heart
 As virtue doth of precious stone make part ;
 Celestial powers fall not from the star
 Till they by solar influence fashioned are.
 When his magnetic ray
 All that is vile or mean hath purged away,
 Then from that radiant star
 Virtue and worth derived infused are.
 So to the gentle heart
 Fair lady's glance like star doth love impart.

¹ 'Rime di diversi Antichi Toscani di Guido Guinizzelli,' pp. 288, 289. Guido Guinizzelli, f. 1220.

'In gentle heart it follows love must stay,
 As on the burnished helm the glancing ray ;
 Subtle the glint which darts from side to side,
 And such the guise beseeming love's true pride.

The nature mean

Towards love as magnet in the fire is seen,
 Cold 'mid the heat ;
 Love and the gentle heart together meet—
 The place akin—
 As iron drawn by loadstone's power unseen,' etc.

The interest of these lines is further enhanced by Dante's own reference to them in his tenth sonnet. On being asked to define the nature of love, he wrote as follows :

'Amor e cor gentil son una cosa
 Siccome il saggio in suo dittato pone
 E così senza l' un l' altro esser osa
 Come alma razional senza ragione.'¹

'Love and the gentle heart agree in one :
 Thus into verse by poet sage 'tis done ;
 As lief without the other one dare be,
 As without reason reasoning soul we see.'

He is, moreover, the poet referred to in the lines of the 'Purgatorio' as having been robbed of his fame by Guido Cavalcanti :

'Così ha tolto l' uno all' altro Guido
 La gloria della lingua ;'
 'Thus hath one Guido from the other snatched
 The letter'd prize ;'

¹ Sonnet x., 'Il Canzoniere di Dante Alighieri,' p. 99.

while the concluding line of the passage is supposed to refer to Dante himself:

‘e forse è nato
Chi l’ uno e l’ altro cacerà dal nido.’

‘And he perhaps is born
Who shall drive either from their nest.’¹

But to return to the theme chosen by Dante, ‘La Rettitudine,’ for it furnishes the solution of apparent inconsistencies in the ‘Divina Commedia,’ and the explanation of what is dark and obscure. Inwardly convinced of the power of a native language, he made use of it while yet in its roughness, not with the object of perfecting romantic poetry nor of illustrating the theme of love, nor yet to flatter those in power, but with the purpose of elucidating the hidden depths of philosophy and theology, taking for his foundation the system of sacred monarchy which he had evolved. Therefore, instead of relying upon pagan authors, he borrows both imagery and method from the Psalms, the Canticles, the Apocalypse, and the Prophets. If we examine the ‘Divina Commedia’ attentively, it becomes at once evident that it resembles in no way the Greek and Latin classical methods of construction, either in space, time, or the action to be represented. With Dante the space is no less than the whole creation—all the known world which he covers in his journey from the centre of the earth to the

¹ ‘Purg.’ xi. 97, *et seq.*

planets, thence to the stars, and even beyond them. As in all that space there must be some connecting-link, we have the strange conception of a gigantic Lucifer, who, falling head downwards from the spheres, displaces the surface of the globe in depth and extent sufficiently to invert the Mount of Purgatory, whose summit is lost in the clouds as it joins the first of the planets. Thus, the gradation of the heights of the 'Purgatorio' is in proportion to the depths of the 'Inferno,' and no less marvellous, producing a scheme of architecture as novel as it is awe-inspiring.

Then, if we consider how these three realms are peopled, and that to each inhabitant is justly apportioned either punishment, probation, or reward, it becomes evident that the eternal principles of truth and justice govern that distribution. Nor are these principles warped, as a superficial observer might think, by human passions. The punishments are not meted out to the enemies of Dante because they were his enemies—in many cases, notably that of Brunetto Latini, his dear and honoured master, the sufferers were his friends—but because they had sinned against that principle of righteousness which was his theme. Like Milton, who followed him, it was the 'great argument' by which he meant to

‘Assert eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.’¹

¹ ‘Paradise Lost,’ c. i.

Under the name of La Drittura, Righteousness appears again in the 'Canzoniere,'¹ and, with reference to the disordered state of Italy, is made thus to reply to Love's question as to who she is :

' Io, che son la più trista
 Son suora alla tua Madre, e son Drittura
 Povera, vedi, a panni ed a cintura.'

Love is here meant to personate the Love of Virtue, whose mother is Justice, while the tattered and dilapidated and poverty-stricken condition of Drittura, *i.e.*, Righteousness, illustrates the strife and confusion of the world at that moment.

Having disposed of the subject-matter adapted for a lofty style, Dante proceeds in his deliberate, methodical way to treat of the manner. Putting aside prose, he devotes his attention to the three forms of poetry then in use: the sonnet, the ballad, and the canzone; and of these three the canzone, in his opinion, bears away the palm. Therefore, leaving the discussion of the ballad and the sonnet for the fourth book, which, as we know, was never written, he devotes himself to the examination of the canzone. He distinguishes briefly the three styles—the tragic, the comic, and the elegiac.

Again relegating these two last to the fourth book, he deals with the tragic style, the highest of all, and destined for the highest theme.

¹ 'Il Canzoniere' xix., p. 206.

It befits no other, and

‘Let no one who attempts either theme or style think that the task can be accomplished without natural gift, great assiduity, and perfect knowledge of the art. Such have been truly described by the poet of the “Æneid” as blessed of the gods, and as immortal sons of the gods let them speak. Palpable, on the other hand, is the folly of those who without science or art rely only upon their own natural talent to attempt to sing the highest themes: let them cease from their presumption, and if from idleness or lack of study they are nothing but geese, let them not attempt to imitate the flight of the eagle.’¹

The succeeding chapters deal with the mechanical construction of rhyme and verse, treating at length of the words, the verses, stanzas, and rhymes, preparing, as he says, the wood for the faggot and the cords, that he may show how the bundle, that is, the canzone, should be united.

To the verse of eleven feet he gives the palm, both on account of the occupation of time, capacity of sentence, construction and choice of words. Dante says that the learned have all been aware of this, and their noblest poems open in this manner.

Verses, we are told, are beautiful when they close in rhyme; but the poet should have free license to arrange them according to his own talents if it makes a harmonious rhythm and avoids repetition.

¹ Lib. ii., c. iv.

He cites the translations from the troubadour poets of his time, most of whom are familiar to us either by name or allusion in the ‘Divina Commedia.’

Gerault de Borneil, who calls his lady-love

‘Mon Sobre Tos’¹
(‘Mio sopra tutti’);

the King of Navarre, Tebaldo II.:

‘Dreit Amor ch’ en mon cor repaire.’²
(‘Dritto Amore che in mio core ripara’);

Folchetto di Marsala:³

‘Tam m’ abelheis l’ amorosos pensameno’
(‘Tanto m’ abbelisce l’ amoroso pensamento’);

ending always with Cino da Pistoja and ‘his friend,’ whose noble canzone⁴

‘Amor che nella mente mi ragiona’

is the song, set to the sweet music of Casella, sung by the spirits in the ‘Purgatorio.’⁵

‘Do not be surprised,’ he concludes, ‘my reader, that I have cited so many examples from so many authors, because it is not possible to judge of the construction of

¹ ‘Purg.,’ xxvi. 120. ‘Quel di Limosi’ (he was a citizen of Limoges).

² ‘Inf.,’ xxii. 52. Ciampolo says: ‘Poi fui famiglio del buon Re Tebaldo.’

³ ‘Par.,’ ix. 94, 95:

‘Folco mi disse quella gente, a cui
Fu noto il nome mio.’

⁴ No. xii., ‘Canzoniere.’

⁵ ‘Purg.,’ ii. 112.

the highest style without some illustration of its perfection. In truth, to obtain a real mastery over style, it would be a most useful study to refer to the classical poets, such as Virgil, the "Metamorphoses" of Ovid, Statius and Lucan; also to those who have written prose in the great style, such as Tullius, Livy, Pliny, Frontinus, Paulus Orosius, and many others, to the study of whose works our own solitude is friendly.¹

These studies must certainly have comprehended the 'Ars Poetica' of Horace, from whom Dante borrowed largely in his treatment of rhyme and metre, and the 'Rhetoric' and 'Poetics' of Aristotle, his revered master, whose Praise is summed up in the single line,

‘Il Maestro di color che sanno.’

Inf., iv. 131.

Evidently such were his great models as to the choice of subjects adapted for poetry, and the method of dealing with them. The quotation from chapter vii. of the first book of the 'Vulgare Eloquio' runs parallel² with the chapter in 'Rhetic' 'Of the Becoming in Style,' and the chapters in the 'Poetics' 'On Diction'³ have laid the ground for the suggestions in the 'Vulgare Eloquio' as to the choice of words.

‘Many, O reader, are those which must be sifted from your vocabulary, so that only the highest and best may

¹ ‘Il Vulgare Eloquio,’ lib. ii., c. vi.

² Aristotle's 'Rhetic,' c. vii.

³ 'Poetics,' c. xix.

remain in your sieve. . . . All puerile words must be discarded—words too feminine in their softness, all the rough harsh dialects of the provinces, all the jabber of the town.'¹

Not to enter into the elaborate discussion which follows, and which would be wearisome if reproduced here, the cultivated and polished citizen is advised to employ words of pure masculine strength for the description of his subject, adding for ornament words of many and high-sounding syllables, which will make an excellent combination.

At last we reach the construction of the canzone in chapter viii. In this and the following chapters the canzone—according to Dante, the most excellent form of poetry—is described.

The art of the canzone seems to consist in three things: the division of the subject, the disposition of the parts, the number of verses and the syllables. Rhymes do not properly belong to a canzone, though it is lawful to introduce them.

In the following chapters are described the action it should recite, and the method of recital. The illustration is given from the famous canzone of the 'Convito':

'Donne che avete intelletto d' amore.'

Rules for the mechanical art of foot and verse

¹ 'Il Volgare Eloquio,' lib. ii., c. vii.

and rhythm, wherewith to interweave the chaplet of verse, occupy the three next chapters. It is obvious that these rules must have afterwards guided Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso in succession. Tasso, it is known, noted the 'Volgare Eloquio' with his own hand. But these appear now to have been quite forgotten in Italy. No modern writer studies them, and therefore none are capable of reproducing the classical canzone of the fourteenth century. Their *versi sciolti*, although, as in the case of Aleardo Aleardi, they often give expression to original and most poetical imaginings, are a very poor exchange for the interwoven crown of grace and rhythm, cadence and melody, which will remain for ever the charm of the Italian lyrics.

As of the manner so of the matter. The great Master would have written upon variety of style, for example, as to one manner being suitable for one subject, and another for another; only the fourteenth chapter, which was to be dedicated to this important subject, breaks off in the middle. The end was either never written or it has been lost. The fragment that remains recommends discretion in the choice of the argument to be treated by the Poetic Muse; that the mode of versification should be adapted to the theme, and as all the subject-matter for poetry is capable of division into two classes, placing the one on the right hand, and the other on the left, that is to say, it is sometimes the province of song to

persuade, sometimes to dissuade, sometimes it should move to joy, sometimes to praise, sometimes to blame;¹ therefore, as the words which treat of things sinister (or on the left hand) should hurry to their close, so, on the contrary, those on the right hand should, with suitable lingering, advance step by step towards their climax.

Here, as if the pen of the writer were suddenly arrested, the chapter breaks off, and the treatise on the sublime style was therefore never finished. No more were the two remaining chapters, which the author intended, as we have seen, to dedicate to the treatment of the comic and elegiac styles, in which the ballad and sonnet would have found their place. Had the work been complete, Dante would have established the laws for every kind of composition in the vulgar tongue, even as he himself said in the course of the work, down to the common daily parlance of family life.

But the fragment which remains to us has been quoted at length, because it contributes in no small degree to the portrait of Dante, which

¹ Compare again Aristotle's 'Poetics,' c. iv. :

'But poetry was divided according to appropriate manners. For men of a more venerable character imitated beautiful actions and the actions of such men ; but the more ignoble imitated the actions of depraved characters, first composing vituperative verses in the same manner as the others composed hymns and encomiums.'

* * * * *

'Hence also the iambic verse is now called, because in this metre they used to iambize, *i.e.*, defame, each other.'

in all his works is more or less drawn by his own hand. These may be said almost to constitute an autobiography of the man, without that touch of egotism which seems almost inseparable from autobiography. Indeed, we find him so true to his maxim, twice over expressed,¹ that a rhetorician should never quote his own name, that his own is always coupled with that of Cino da Pistoja as 'l'amico suo,' who chose for his theme 'La Rettitudine.' For with Dante his own personality is always second to the work he undertakes. It is there, unmistakable in its familiar, severe outlines, but subordinate to the matter in hand. Original, almost archaic in its simplicity, is the passage which traces all language to its source; and then suddenly the proud yet wistful exile stands before us in his regret that he cannot in justice, notwithstanding his unalterable love for his country, assign to her language the coveted distinction of having been the first language uttered in Paradise.

With the utmost deliberation, step by step, he proceeds in his careful analysis, and by his masterly division of the European languages into groups forestalls in the thirteenth century the modern methods of comparative philological and ethnographical research. Then some little touch of irony in the illustration, like that of the ugly woman bedizened with gold and silk, the ox in trappings or the pig in a sash, brings Dante

¹ 'Convito Trattato,' I., c. ii., p. 1; 'Purg.,' xxx. 63.

before us in his strong sense of humour—or, again, in his love of order and fitness, when he lays down the axiom that ‘ornament is nothing but the addition of something befitting the object to be adorned.’ Here we find again forestalled the keystone of the architecture of the Renaissance.

Dante took nothing for granted. All his work is drawn from life—the result of personal observation, personal exertion, personal care. Just as the phenomena of Nature in every varied phase of beauty, and at every hour of the day, from the first silver streak of the dawn to the last ray of the setting sun, became familiar to his eye in his nineteen years of wandering, suggesting reflections and illustrations which are set like pearls along the thread of his great conception of the ‘Divina Commedia,’ so to the same causes may be attributed his oral acquaintance with all the dialects of Italy.

From the friendly and beautiful solitude of the Castello of Tolmino, where he probably took refuge from the harsh accents of Aquileja, to Padua, thence to Bologna, through the Romagna and Puglia, where yet lingered the cultivated influence of the Court of Frederick II. and Manfred his son, the ear attuned to the melody of Casella, which in the ‘Purgatorio’ could anticipate the celestial harmony of the spheres, caught and noted, one by one, the characteristics of each dialect, sifted and classified them all.

We have seen that Dante took the Tower of

Babel and the confusion of speech for his starting-point in his treatise on the 'Volgare Eloquio,' and there is a dramatic unity of purpose highly characteristic of his mind in the intention which he so adequately fulfilled of fusing again into one language the various dialects of Italy.

But the great Master did more yet. He taught by example as well as by precept. Not only did he create the Italian language out of the raw material of jargon and dialect, but he secured for that language immortality when he wove it into such a chaplet of verse as must for ever remain the birthright and the inheritance, as of the past, so of every future generation.

'Del bel Paese là dove il sì suona.'

Inf., xxxiii. 80.

'In that fair region, where the Italian voice
Is heard.'

CARY, *Trans.*

CHAPTER IV.

LIFE AND PUPILS AT RAVENNA

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LIFE AND PUPILS AT RAVENNA.

'Dimmi, Maestro mio, dimmi, Signore.'
Inf., iv. 46.

THE biographers are not in accord as to the exact locality of Dante's house in Ravenna, but there is no doubt that he had one assigned to him by Guido Novello, where he might live in undisturbed peace, and, free from all molesting cares, pursue his great work.

It was also the centre of a little circle of friends and pupils, whom he taught, and whose boast it was to have received instruction in poetry from him.

Five centuries have learnt from the written words of Dante; but who were the pupils who hung on his living lips? Foremost among them stands the remarkable figure of Guido da Polenta, whose reverence for his master was such as may be best expressed by the well-known line that 'ne'er from son to father more was owed.'¹

¹ 'Che più non dee a padre alcun figliuolo.'
Purg., i. 33.

This veneration is all the more remarkable as the Polentani cannot be said to have been favourably dealt with in the 'Divina Commedia.'

With regard to the principal episode connected with them, that of Francesca da Rimini, the aunt of Guido Novello, there was no doubt that Guido was himself familiar with the famous lines which describe her story, as he imported one of them, 'Che mai da me non fia diviso,' into one of his own sonnets.¹

Moreover, it might be reasonably urged that the handling of the narrative by Dante, and the unrivalled pathos which he imparts to it, might go far to reinstate the unfortunate Francesca in the opinion of posterity. It certainly gave the keynote to one of the earliest historical narratives of the event as recounted by Boccaccio.²

But apart from this episode, which can of course be considered in two ways, the family of the Polenta are rigidly dealt with by Dante. They are not exempted from the fierce invectives against the tyrants of the Romagna, into which category also falls the family of Caterina, the wife of Guido Novello. She was descended from the Bagnacavalli, a family specially singled out for vituperation in the 'Inferno,' in words which could be hardly pleasing to their surviving descendant.³ Nevertheless, so strong was the

¹ Sonnet xii., 'Ultimo Rifugio,' p. 384.

² 'Il Comento di Giovanni Boccaccio sopra la Commedia,' vol. i., p. 476, lezione xx.

³ 'Inf.,' xxx. 76-78.

love of letters and learning, so great the veneration inspired by the personality of the poet, blended, perhaps, with a feeling of compassion for his unmerited and unhappy exile, that there seems to have been no place left for rancour in the mind of the generous Polentani. Far from this, the hospitality to the father extended itself to the son, and benefactions were heaped upon Pietro di Dante by Caterina and her family. Such generosity makes a bright spot in the dark annals of a period when revenge for injuries received was a matter of course, and, far from being a vice, even aspired to a place on the borderland of virtue.

The just verdict of posterity recognises the noble exception afforded by the example of the Polenta family, and has repaired all former injury by associating for ever the name of Guido Novello with that of Dante. Much interest centres round their relationship as pupil and teacher. There is historical confirmation of the fact that Guido Novello learnt from Dante the art of poetry, described in those days as 'il dire in rime volgare,' the secrets of which art seem, as we have seen, to have been comprised in the 'Volgare Eloquio,' and happily there are sonnets by Guido still extant which serve to prove that he was no unworthy follower in the footsteps of his great Master. There is a collection of his verses in the "Codice Marciano,"¹ gathered from various sources

¹ cxci, cl. ix., Ital. Sec. xvi. 'Ultimo Rifugio,' etc., 86, 87.

by a Venetian, Antonio Isidoro Mezzabarba, and copied, as the note records,

‘by my own hand in the month of May, 1509, neither changing in any way, nor adding to that which I have found in the ancient books.’

This collection consists of sixteen ballads in which we discover a certain power as well as variety of expression not always to be found in the minor poets of that period, and which recall the influence of his great Master, more distinctly to be perceived when compared with his ‘Canzoniere’ than with his great poem.

We recognise many familiar turns of thought and language besides the one already cited out of sonnet xii., which finds its counterpart in the episode of Francesca da Rimini, and which for that reason is reproduced at length:

‘Era l’ær sereno e lo bel tempo
Et cantavan gli augei per la rivera,
Et in quel giorno apparve primavera
Quand’ io te vidi prima bella gioia.
Ben fosti gioia, che tal m’ apparisti
E co’l novo color nel tuo bel viso,
Che già da la mia mente non si parte,
E quando sono in più lontana parte,
Più mi sovven de’l tuo piacente riso
Si dolcemente ne’l mio cor venisti
Per un soave sguardo che facisti,
Da tuoi begli occhi, che mi mirar fiso

Si che già da me non fia diviso
 Tanta allegrezza mi dà fuor di noia.¹

'Serene the air, and sweet the happy time,
 When spring appears—the glad year's fairest part—
 And on the banks the birds rang tuneful chime
 When first I saw thee, jewel of my heart !
 Jewel ! Ah yes ! As such thou didst appear
 When the fair colour flashed across thy face,
 And never leaves my thoughts that vision dear.
 When far away, in sad and lonely case,
 I most bethink me of thy radiant smile ;
 And straight into my inmost heart doth come,
 In memory fond, that sweetest glance erewhile
 Shot from thine eyes—and, piercing, found its home.
 Henceforth divided never can we be,
 And joy from grief's sad clutch doth ransom me.'

To cite one more example especially pleasing on account of the grace of thought and diction :

'Quando specchiate, Donna, il vostro viso
 Il cor del vostro servo
 Vedete com' è fatto e dove è miso.
 Come del viso al specchio ogni bellezza
 Vi si mostra compiuta,
 Così fermate 'l cor da la chiarezza
 Quella cor desiosi occhi sentuta ;
 Sì che non è fattezza
 Nel viso bel, che 'n lui non sia veduta,
 Onde l' onesto sguardo è l dolce riso
 Con la forza d' Amore,
 Il tiene in quel, da lui sempre diviso.'²

¹ 'Ultimo Rifugio,' appendix, quoted from Cod. Marciano, cxcii.,
 vv. 1, 2. Ballate di Guido da Polenta.

² *Ibid.*, xv.

'Lady, when in thy face thy servant's heart,
 As in a mirror, clear reflected lies,
 See how 'tis formed, and look on ev'ry part ;
 As the reflection with the object vies
 So read thy servant's heart in thine own eyes,
 And see him stand reflected in thy sight.
 There is no feature in thy own fair face
 Which calls not forth an answer from thy knight.
 Thy smile, thy look, command an answering grace,
 And Love, thy willing servant, Lady fair,
 E'en though apart, must ever hold him there.'

The cultured and refined taste which could in the midst of a barbarous age find expression in such delicate forms of thought was not less susceptible to the influence of the sister art of painting. It is no uncertain tradition which records that at the instance of Guido da Polenta Giotto was summoned to Ravenna by Dante.

We may please ourselves with fancying these two friends the great types of the highest attainable perfection in the sister arts in the thirteenth century, following and interpreting each other more and more in the close harmony of a friendship which had deepened with advancing years. In process of ripening when both were at Rome in the year of the jubilee, 1300, it had matured itself in that brief interval between the return of Dante to Florence and his fatal embassy to Boniface VIII.¹

The record of that period of their friendship

¹ *Vide ante*, p. 29.

remains in the authentic contemporary portrait of the poet, introduced by Giotto into his fresco, on the walls of the Bargello, representing the arrival of Charles of Valois as the pacifier of Florence. This famous incident in the feud between the Bianchi and Neri resulted, as it is well known, in the perpetual exile of Dante. But by a strange irony of fate his painted semblance, as portrayed by the hand of his friend, remains as a perpetual spectator of the event so fatal to his hopes. The episode is represented, moreover, on the walls of the Palazzo whence issued the harsh and often-repeated decrees of perpetual banishment.

Many years of exile had passed over that head when the two friends met again, and Giotto must have gazed once more upon the face so faithfully delineated by him in the prime of manhood and the flush of fame. It is sad that no portrait should be extant by the same hand representing that same countenance as it must have appeared then, wan with long years of persevering study,¹ darkened with disappointed hope, furrowed with the hardships of his wandering life! And yet through all must have blazed the unquenched fire of genius—above all, the ennobling influence of a lifelong converse with things Divine. Such a portrait Giotto, and only Giotto, the contemporary artist, the companion mind, the beloved

¹ 'Si che m' ha fatto per più anni macro.'

Par., xxv. 3.

and intimate friend,¹ might have painted. Alas that such a portrait does not form part of the few genuine fragments of Giotto's work in Ravenna ! All that now exists is to be found in the side-chapel of San Giovanni Evangelista, representing the Evangelists with their symbols, and the Latin Fathers of the Church—SS. Gregory, Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome. These have been so repainted that the original work makes itself felt with difficulty through the gray film which defaces it.

Once the Church of Sta. Maria in Porto Fuori was all covered with paintings by Giotto ; not one trace of them remains. But the beautiful work of his pupils, Giuliano, Giovanni, and Pietro da Rimini, has been recently redeemed from the whitewash which defaced it by the patient effort of Don Pio Pozzi, the priest in charge of the church, revealing certain characteristics of type which indicate both Giotto and Dante among the bystanders in the frescoes of the Presentation. Although this representation of the two friends can only rest upon tradition, contemporary evidence will furnish historical proof of the actual presence of Giotto in Ravenna at that time.

The chain is unbroken. First of all we find the record of a sum of 300 scudi, bequeathed by Lamberto da Polenta in his will bearing date January 18, 1316, for the express purpose of

¹ Vasari : 'Di cui era moltissimo amico ;' vol. i., p. 372.

restoring the fabric of San Giovanni Evangelista. Next in order we read of the determination of Guido Novello, the immediate successor of Lambert, to summon Giotto through the agency of Dante to undertake the decorative part of the work. Finally, there is the treatise composed by Rainaldo Concoreggio, at that time Archbishop of Ravenna, upon Galla Placidia and her church, 'now about to be rededicated after the completion of its restoration.'¹

This Archbishop forms another figure in the remarkable group which Dante, the great personality of Dante, gathered round him at Ravenna. He came of a noble Milanese family, and studied at Bologna contemporaneously with Dante. At Lodi he was offered the post of a Teacher of Law at the rate of 40 imperial livres a year, to which ten more were to be added if he succeeded in obtaining his degree, which he did. Having subsequently taken Holy Orders, a rapid and splendid career was immediately open to him, due in the first instance, no doubt, to the influence of his powerful family, but ably seconded by his own great learning and ability. He became chaplain to Boniface VIII., thence was promoted to the See of Vicenza, and afterwards was sent to France as Papal Nuncio during the war between Philip IV. and Edward III. of England. On his return to Italy, having been appointed Vicar-General of the Romagna, he

¹ 'Mur. Rev. Ital. Script.,' t. i., part ii., 567.

went unarmed to mediate between the Ordelaffi and the insurgent populace of Forlì, and was so severely wounded that his recovery was looked upon as little short of a miracle. Finally, he was elected Archbishop of Ravenna, where his care of his diocese, his zeal in his pastoral office, his remarkable learning, which he devoted to reconstructing the decaying schools of theology and music in Ravenna, and his simple piety, single him out from among the rapacious and ambitious clergy of the time, just as Guido da Polenta stands alone in his cultivation and refinement amongst the lawless tyrants of the Romagna.

It is curious that this Archbishop should have been so little noticed by the early biographers of Dante, for it is not an improbable surmise, though it cannot pretend to even the basis of tradition, that those great and kindred minds must have met in intercourse upon the scene of a common interest like the restoration of the ancient church of San Giovanni Evangelista.

The Archbishop predeceased Dante by a few short weeks, or perhaps his name would have been recorded in a manner less ambiguous than that of a predecessor in the See of Ravenna, Archbishop Bonifazio :

‘Che pasturò col rocco molte genti,’¹

¹ ‘Purg.’ xxiv. 29, 30, *i.e.* :

‘Who from the revenues of his bishopric fed his flock.’

The *rocco* was the ancient pastoral staff of the See of Ravenna. It was so called because, instead of the usual crook in which the

if, indeed, it had not shared the honours of Pier Damiano in the 'Paradiso.'¹

The sarcophagus to which the remains of Archbishop Rainaldo were consigned, a specimen of early Christian art, is still to be seen in the cathedral at Ravenna. Hardly were the funeral rites completed, when Dante was himself overtaken by the illness which closed his mortal career.

Guido Novello, the Archbishop Rainaldo, and Giotto, are the great personal contemporaries of Dante in Ravenna, and among his pupils Guido may claim precedence on every ground. Within a very short period of each other—indeed, in a manner almost simultaneous—all these great characters passed from this world's stage; but there were others belonging to either the first or second category, and sometimes both, who contributed their meed of interest and no insignificant details to fill in the picture of the time. We read of Ser Dino Perini, Ser Pietro di Messer Giardino the notary, Menghino Mezzani the rhymester, Fiduccio dei Milotti the companion

crozier terminates, it was surmounted by a little shrine, or *rocco*. The line refers not only to the government of his people, but to his large liberalities. These, together with a personal failing, that of gluttony, must have been equally a tradition in Ravenna when Dante was resident there. With characteristic impartiality, both aspects of the character of the Archbishop are presented in the 'Divina Commedia.' He is assigned a place among the gluttons in that division of the 'Purgatorio' where this crime against self is expiated; but at the same time is chronicled the redeeming virtue of his great liberality to others. He filled the See of Ravenna for twenty years (1274-1294).

¹ 'Par.', xxi. 120, *et seq.*

of his walks in the Pineta, who dissuaded Dante from going to Bologna, Niccolo Carnevalli, Achille Mattarelli, and Bernardo Canaccio, who many years afterwards engraved the epitaph on the poet's tomb.

It may be asked how these names have been preserved through the long tract of centuries, and it is satisfactory, and at the same time very interesting, to trace them sometimes under a feigned classical name in the Latin eclogues written by the poet himself from Ravenna to Giovanni del Virgilio. Giovanni del Virgilio, so called because of the facility he displayed in imitating Virgil, was a Bolognese, and held a school in Bologna, where he received a salary from the State. He afterwards moved to Cesena, where he died; but he was at Bologna when the remarkable correspondence took place between him and Dante. This correspondence has already been alluded to in order to fix the date of Dante's residence at Ravenna.¹

We will now examine it more closely, as from it, as from a lantern held by the poet himself, there falls the most certain light upon this period of his life. The correspondence consists of one poem, the 'Carmen,' as it is called, of Giovanni del Virgilio, and three eclogues. The authenticity of all has been clearly proved,² and there have been several recent Italian editions with annota-

¹ *Vide ante*, Introduction p. 11.

² 'Ultimo Rifugio,' p. 68.

tions, from which the following account of them has been taken. The 'Carmen' opens the correspondence. In the first hexameters, Giovanni del Virgilio praises Dante for his noble work of the 'Divina Commedia,' the great theme of those immortal 'cantiche':

'Which in new rhymes the listening age beguile,
 Fixing of souls their after-state, the while
 Thou from three diverse confines draw'st the veil.
 In Pit of Hell the bad their sins bewail,
 The penitent in Lethe are washed white,
 The blest ascend to realms beyond the light ;'

and then takes him to task for writing in the vulgar tongue :

' Ah, wherefore theme so grand, so grave, so vast,
 Before the vulgar herd dost deign to cast,
 And we, the Poets, who thy meaning prize,
 Turn towards thee, in longing vain, our eyes :
 For well 'tis known the Poet Sage will none
 Of people's jargons, were there even one !
 And there are thousand such. Till now
 None of that Choir, sixth amongst whom thou,¹
 E'er sung in common parlance, nor yet he
 Thou followest heavenwards.² Suffer me,
 Censor of Poets, greatest among men !
 Ah ! suffer me to speak, nor chide my pen.

¹ 'Inf.,' iv. 102. Homer, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Lucan.

' Si ch' io fui sesto tra cotanto senno.'

² 'Purg.,' xxii. Statius, whom Dante followed with Virgil round the fifth cornice of the 'Purgatorio.'

' Seguiva in su gli spiriti veloci.'

Throw not with lavish hand thy pearls to swine,
 Nor clothe unworthily the Muse divine ;
 But still thy verse in such a form unfold
 Common to all—all clear thy meaning hold.'

He then implores Dante to address his next poem to the pacification of Italy, harassed on all sides and devastated by war, and the following lines contain allusions to the principal historical events of the period, and fix approximately the date of the correspondence :

' Awake, then ! tell how wings to realms above
 His lofty flight the sacred Bird of Jove ;¹
 Of Lilies lopped by Ploughman's ruthless hand ;²
 How writhe 'neath canine fangs the Frison Band ;³
 Tell how Ligurian shore with triumph hails,
 Resounding loud, Parthenope's proud sails :
 Till Cadiz wake Alcides' giant rock,
 And through the world reverberates the shock !
 Ister to Fano will repeat thy strain,
 And Dido's shores re-echo it again.'⁴

But the exact date seems to be fixed by the lines which describe in the present tense the siege of Genoa in the winter of the following year, 1319.

¹ The Eagle of the Empire—this is an allusion to the death of the Emperor Henry VII., August 24, 1313.

² The rout of the Florentines by Ugccione della Faggiola at Montecabini, August 29, 1315.

³ The slaughter of the Paduans by Can Grande della Scala between 1314-1318.

⁴ The triumphant entry of King Robert of Naples into Genoa, July, 1318, which resounded throughout the four quarters of the European world.

'E'en now there fills my ears loud din of war,
 And threats which menace, both from near and far,
 O Father Apennine, thy lofty crest,
 And thou Tyrrhenian sea by storms possessed ! .
 O Mars ! what dost thou, scatt'ring wide all peace ?
 Then tune thy lyre and bid such discord cease.'

The poetical metaphors, which appear so high-flown, are supported by the historical narrative of the events by Muratori, in which he relates how fiercely the battle raged both by sea and land round Genoa before the siege was raised and King Robert able to make his escape to Avignon.¹

Such a subject as this, the eclogue proceeds to say, treated in Latin verse, and not in the vulgar tongue, would be worthy of the pen of Dante, and would obtain for him the laurel crown of Bologna, whither Giovanni del Virgilio adjures him to come—in the concluding lines of his poem—or, if he will not come, will he at least send him a friendly word, to say the appeal has not been distasteful to him? Alluding to the residence of Dante at Ravenna,

'Su la marina dove 'l Po discende
 Per aver pace co' seguaci sui'
 (*Inf.*, v. 98, 99),

he is apostrophized as—

¹ 'Annali d' Italia,' t. viii., pp. 72, 75, 107, 108.

'Dweller on banks of Po,¹ if hope canst give
 That thou wilt come and in my dwelling live,
 Some friendly missive send ; nor take amiss
 The fevered lines I send to thee with this,
 Unworthy crow that dares uplift its note,²
 Nor falls abashed before the Swan's proud throat—
 Answer, my master, or my prayer fulfil.'

No common interest centres round the reply of Dante, which was apparently despatched about the summer of 1319. It is couched in the form of an eclogue, closely modelled upon the *Pastorals* of his great Master, Virgil, to which both the locality and the circumstances lend themselves with curious exactitude, the first *Pastoral* of Virgil being written from 'the lands about Cremona and Mantua,' when Virgil was in exile, though afterwards—and here the comparison fails—restored to his country. Yet when Dante wrote his eclogue his hopes were not yet dead, as we may gather from its wistful lines. He follows Virgil exactly in his personation of Tityrus, while to his friend Dino Perini he gives the name of Melibœus.³ Giovanni del Virgilio he addresses as Mopsus—'one of two

¹ Ravenna was at that time surrounded by the various branches of the great river. The Po di Primaro, the Po di Padoreno, and the branch called the Padenna, actually flowed through the streets of the town.

² Probably imitated from

'And the hoarse raven on the blasted bough.'

DRYDEN'S *Virgil*, Pastoral i.

³ This is shown by a gloss upon the MS. supposed to have been written by Boccaccio. Codice Laurenziana, xxix. 8; quoted in 'Ultimo Rifugio,' p. 84.

very expert shepherds at song,' as Dryden tells us. The classical scholar will pardon a quotation from Dryden's translation of the well-known opening of the first *Pastoral*, for the purpose of showing how much the eclogue of Dante was influenced by it.

Melibœus speaks :

' "Beneath the shade which beechen boughs diffuse,
You, Tityrus, entertain your sylvan muse ;
Round the wide world in banishment we roam,
Forced from our pleasing fields and native home."'¹

Dante opens his eclogue by declaring that when the poem reached him he was collecting his pastured goats ('le Pasciute capre'²). He throws his composition into the form of a dialogue, which runs thus :

'On the white sheet impressed, the lettered line
Of songs inspired by the heavenly nine
We saw, Melibœus and I, expressed
In graceful terms, and thus to us addressed.
Still as we stood beneath the oak-tree shade,
And of the pastured flocks the reckoning made,
Melibœus³ spake : "O Tityrus,⁴ my friend,
Speak, then, and tell me what doth Mopsus⁵ send ?"
And while I laughed, insisting as before,
He pressed his fond entreaties more and more.

¹ The First *Pastoral*, or Tityrus and Melibœus, Dryden's Trans., I-4.

² In the same MS. already cited another gloss substitutes 'scolares' for 'capre.'

³ Dino Perini.

⁴ Dante.

⁵ Giovanni del Virgilio.

At length, O Mopsus, yielding to his whim
 For friendship's sake, I turned and spoke to him :
 " Insensate, mind thy flocks, nor vainly heed
 Aught else," I said ; " thy utmost care they need."¹

But Melibœus persisting in his demand, Dante pours forth his idyll, and, declining the invitation to Bologna, gives free course to the still cherished hope of return to his country, there and there only to receive the poet's crown, in terms which run parallel with the well-known lines in the 'Divina Commedia,'¹

' Rather would I wait
 Till my own country grant a triumph late,
 And laurel wreath for hoary locks prepare—
 Locks which erewhile on Arno's banks were fair.'

Melibœus urges the flight of time, and asks when will that moment come, to which Tityrus (Dante) replies again, and that reply indicates exactly the point which he had reached, at that time, in the composition of the 'Divina Commedia' :

' " When my songs relate
 How planets circle round the heavenly gate,
 Of souls in bliss the sweet estate shall tell
 As of those left in Purgatory or Hell,
 Then shall the bay and laurel intertwine
 To crown my brows—for, Mopsus, they are mine."

¹ 'Par.,' xxv. 5 :

' Con altra voce omai, con altro vello
 Ritornerò Poeta, ed in sul fonte
 Del mio Battesimo prenderò il Cappello.'

“But Mopsus,” urged Meliboeus, “dost not see—
 Will not away with words in comedy?
 Such common parlance and such trivial sound
 Beseech the women, and with them abound.
 So does he write, and to Castalian choir
 Blushes that songs like these should e'er aspire !”
 He spake thus, Mopsus, then did loud exclaim,
 “What power can Mopsus change, or heal his blame ?”

The allegory which follows of the favoured solitary sheep, while the rest of the flock repose under the shadow of a great rock, the sheep which is to give milk so abundant¹ as to fill ten vessels, is interpreted to mean ten cantos of the ‘Paradiso,’ as yet unknown to the world, while the great rock which shelters the rest of the flock is supposed to represent the mount of Purgatory.

‘One favoured sheep I have, thou knowest well;
 So rich in milky store that none can tell
 The great abundance. While the flock remain
 ‘Neath the great rock upon the sheltered plain,
 Or else in search of food together roam,
 Apart and solitary she wanders home.
 No shepherd’s wand compels her willing feet,
 But straightway comes to yield the treasure sweet ;
 From the rich source ten vessels overflow,
 And these to Mopsus will my labours show.

¹ The ‘abundance’ is intended to represent the abundant, flowing verse of the ‘Divina Commedia,’ called the ‘Bucolicum Carmen,’ because written in the vulgar tongue, by contrast with the scant paucity of the Latin eclogues.

Tend thou the goats, for good teeth will they need
 On the hard bread of charity to feed.¹
 And thus, still sitting 'neath the spreading oak,
 And reasoning o'er the words Meliboeus spoke,
 We sang and pondered o'er each other's lays,
 While in the hut hard by prepared the maize.'

The interesting correspondence continues, for Giovanni del Virgilio hastens to reply from his native 'cave' or 'grotto' in Bologna to the poet, whose lays have been despatched to him from the pine forest at Ravenna :

'There, where on meadow's sward of emerald green
 The dense, deep shadow of the pines is seen—
 Pines that as sentinels in long, dark row
 Man the lone coast where Hadrian's breezes blow
 Soft as the zephyr o'er the favoured strand ;
 Where flow'ring myrtles scent the pleasant land,
 And limpid waters, hurrying to the sea,
 O'erflow their banks and bid them fertile be :
 In such a spot, and 'neath such grateful shade,
 E'en there, O Tityrus, thy song was made.
 Then Eurus breathed, and o'er the murmuring trees
 The echo reached me, borne upon the breeze ;
 And through the rocky steep, distinct and clear,
 It fell as balsam on my list'ning ear.
 The milk I taste—or was it nectar's wine ?
 For since the golden age no draught like thine

¹ 'Come su di sale
 Lo pane altrui, e com' è duro calle
 Lo scendere e 'l salir per l' altrui scale.'
Par., xvii. 59, 60.

Can shepherd pond'ring o'er his flocks recall,
E'en though Arcadian pastures bred them all.
Ah ! woe is me, that base and sordid shed,
Should sadly canopy thy honoured head,
Or that thy noble soul should grieve and fret
(Shame on the graceless city, cruel yet !)
O'er flocks which wander homeless on the plain,
While Arno's meadows stretch their shores in vain.
Forgive thy Mopsus, nor shall useless tears
O'erflow mine eyes and conjure up new fears,
Adding fresh torments to thy bitter fate.
Oh, my sweet master ! on whose words I wait,
Round whom my love in fond embrace doth twine
As wreathes the husband elm, the clinging vine,
Rather let hope in flatt'ring, fond presage
Bid youth regild the hoary head of age,
Near the baptismal font the feast prepare,
And drop the laurel garland on thine hair.
Ah ! who shall paint the joy and dear delight
When thy loved country dawns upon thy sight !
But as on Time and Chance we patient wait,
Time that doth travel but with heavy gait,
Come thou to me, my tranquil rest to share,
Relax thy mind, and free thy soul from care,
And thought exchange with thought, as friend with
friend ;
Thus in sweet harmony our songs shall blend,
Upon the reed pipe I, take thou the lyre,
As best befits of noble song the sire.

* * * * *

‘Here will flock
Both old and young from sweet Parnassus’ rock ;

Those who would see the honoured face again,
 To learn the old and hear thy newest strain ;
 Come, then, I pray thee . . .
 . . . Mopsus, art thou mad ?
 Paltry thy gifts, thy dwelling mean and bad.
 Can these with Jolas¹ palace proud compare ?—
 Jolas, who tends his guests with courteous care ;
 And yet again Hope spreads her flutt'ring wings,
 Still 'neath thy feet the quick desire springs.
 Hast ever seen a maid with fond delight
 Behold a child, what time the child's keen sight
 Follows a bird, the bird the waving trees—
 Trees which all eager wait the fresh'ning breeze ?
 Ah, Tityrus ! to thee in such a guise
 Doth Mopsus turn his ever-longing eyes.
 Despise him not, but come, for it is said
 Love born of sight by sight is also made.'

In a second eclogue, Dante meets and replies to the poetic effusion of his friend. We read first, in the opening lines, of Melibœus running and panting with eagerness to bring him the missive from Giovanni del Virgilio. And then another friend comes upon the scene, to whom Dante gives the name of Alfesibeo. He was in reality Fiduccio dei Milotti,² by birth a Tuscan of Certaldo, but at that time a doctor of medicine in Ravenna—a favourite companion of Dante in his walks in the Pineta, who warned him against leaving Ravenna for Bologna, and

¹ Name chosen for Guido Novello.

² Noted in the margin of the MS. as follows : 'Magister Fiducius de' Milottis de Certaldo, Medicus, qui tunc, morabatur Ravenna.' — 'Ultimo Rifugio,' p. 105.

who in all probability, as he survived Dante, must have attended him in his last hours.

But to return to the eclogue. The hour of the day, and this time it is the full mid-day heat of the sun, is indicated in one of those semi-mythological, semi-astronomical descriptions which so often recur in the pages of the 'Divina Commedia'—Tityrus and Alphesibæus, taking pity on the flock and themselves, have fled from the heat of the town into the outskirts of the forest, and there

'Neath shade of lime and plane and ash-tree gray
The lambs and kids in mixed confusion lay ;
And, Tityrus, above thy aged head
A maple's boughs their shelt'ring welcome spread ;
Thy weary limbs doth knotty staff sustain,
Cut from the pear which in the earth had lain.
Alphesibæus spake, and smoothly flow
His lucid reasonings, as he would show
That souls which from the stars receive their force
Must to those stars return in Nature's course,' etc.

The translation is not pursued, because all readers of the 'Divina Commedia' will be familiar with the passages which treat the same subject, only at greater length and with more mastery.¹ But it is interesting to see how strictly Dante adheres to his model Virgil, for the discussion of the Platonic philosophy by Alphesibæus finds a close parallel in the

¹ 'Purg.', xxv. 52, *et seq.* 'Par.', iv. 1, *et seq.*

description by Silenus of the formation of the universe and the origin of animals according to the Epicurean philosophy.

‘He sang the secret seeds of Nature’s frame,
How seas and earth, and air, and active flame
Fell through the mighty void, and in their fall
Were blindly gathered in this goodly ball,’ etc.

DRYDEN’S *Virgil*, Pastoral vi.

Dante, continuing the imaginary dialogue, puts these words into the mouth of Alphesibæus :

“Revered old man, dost dare to leave again
The dewy meadows of Pelorus’ plain,
And seek the darkness of the Cyclops’ cave?”
“My friend, what fear’st thou for me, what wilt have?”
“Oh, my sweet master! prythee with us stay,
Nor heed the voice which would thee lure away;
Climb not the steeps of Etna’s shaggy rock—
The forest nymphs forbid—thy loving flock,
Sad and bereaved, their master’s loss bewail;
Hill, wood, and stream repeat the same sad tale.”

* * * * *

By Pelorus he indicates the plain round Ravenna, as by the rocks of Etna the approach to Bologna, and any modern traveller will recognise without effort the justice of the comparison. But on account of his great love for Mopsus these objections would not have weighed with him did he not fear the giant Polyphemus.

“Though Etna’s craggy steeps compare in vain
With the smooth fragrance of the smiling plain,
Yet, Mopsus, as for thee my heart doth burn,
To thee, by love impelled, my steps would turn ;
E’en my loved flock would leave behind me here,
But for thee, Polypheme, whose wrath I fear——”

“And who,” Alphesibæus spoke again,
“Did such as Polypheme e’er fear in vain ?
Horrid the monster, deaf to prayer or tear,
And wont with gore his tangled locks to smear.
Aye, Galatea, since that fatal day
When done to death his victim Acis lay,
And thou, in breathless terror’s rapid flight,
Didst scarce evade the giant’s eager sight,
Can love with such o’erwhelming force contend ?
Bethink thee well of the forgotten friend
In Cyclops’ cave, Achemenides left
In dire distress, alone, of hope bereft,
His soul aghast, for there before his eyes,
Stained with his comrade’s blood, the monster lies !
The gods forbid !” thus Alphesibæus said,
“Go not, my life. Ah ! spare thy honoured head,
Nor heed Bologna’s Naiad when she weaves
Of laurel garland the perpetual leaves.”

And thus, O Tityrus, into thy mind
Sank words of wisdom and entreaties kind,
Unheeded not they fell, nor without force.
But see, the car of Phœbus turns its course,
Cleaving so fast, in its descent, the skies,
That broad upon the earth the shadow lies.
Homewards, behind their flocks, their way
The shepherds take, while fades the dying day—
Flocks which, returning from the valleys cold

And distant woods, already seek the fold ;
 The shaggy goats the bleating troop precede.
 Meanwhile hard by, where ends the flow'ry mead,
 Jolas the wise the long discourse had heard,
 And there, unseen, had noted every word ;
 Each word to us he showed in meaning plain,
 Which we to thee, O Mopsus, tell again.¹

Various conjectures have been hazarded as to who this giant is meant to represent, whether Romeo de' Pepoli, at that time Tyrant of Bologna, King Robert and the Guelph party generally, or a certain 'Zenga,' a contemporary of Dante, and a descendant of the Venetico, and Ghisolabella Caccianimici of the 'Inferno,'² eager to avenge the insults of the poet.

Whoever it was that the giant was intended to personate, Dante thought it wiser to abide by the counsel, either real or feigned, of 'Alfesibeo,' and to stay at Ravenna under the protection of his kind friend and patron, Guido Novello, referred to in the last eclogue under the name of Jolas. True to his imitation of Virgil throughout, the name of Jolas was chosen on account of the friendship between Jolas and Æneas.

It has been thought worth while to analyze carefully the Latin correspondence between Giovanni del Virgilio and Dante, because those who have the patience to unravel the somewhat stilted classical similitudes which were the

¹ 'Il Canzoniere di Dante Alighieri uggintori le Egloghe Latine di Giovanni del Virgilio e di Dante Alighieri,' pp. 410, 437.

² 'Inf.,' xviii. 41, 66.

characteristic of the period will find the clue not only to the life and friendship of the poet at Ravenna, but also to the progress of his great work. For we gather from the correspondence some very important facts. In the first place, that early in the year 1319 both the 'Inferno' and the 'Purgatorio' were not only completed, but known and discussed in Bologna, at that time the principal University of the civilized world, and the resort of thousands of students.

In the second place, as to the 'Paradiso.' More than once we find in the Latin eclogues ideas and passages which recall some of the best-known lines of the 'Paradiso.' We have seen that ten cantos were, at all events, completed, for under the simile of the 'ten vessels of milk' they were despatched to Giovanni del Virgilio at Bologna, received, read, and highly approved by him. There is no actual evidence to prove which these were, but if we compare the opening of the tenth canto, where the reader is invited to lift his eyes to the celestial spheres that he may

‘See how thence oblique
Brancheth the circle where the planets roll,’¹

with the lines in the eclogue,

‘When my songs relate
How planets circle round the heavenly gate,’

¹ ‘Par.’ x. 12-15:

‘Vedi come da indi sidirama
L’ obliquo cerchio che i Pianehi porta,’ etc.

it rather suggests itself that the composition had reached that point, and that the first ten cantos of the 'Paradiso' were the portion of the poem despatched to Bologna.

By means of the Latin correspondence we have gained some acquaintance with Dino Perini under the name of Melibœus, and Fiduccio dei Milotti under the name of Alphesibæus. But the picture would not be complete without the mention of three other friends and pupils whose connection with their great Master can be traced with almost equal certainty, although their names do not appear in the eclogues, Pietro Giardini, Menghino Mezzani, and Bernardo Canaccio.

Pietro Giardini, whose family dates back to the beginning of the thirteenth century, had been for some years a notary in Ravenna before Dante came to take up his sojourn there. This is proved by a document in the archiepiscopal archives dated May 18, 1311, bearing his signature. Besides this deed, many others attested by him are extant to prove his existence in Ravenna up to the year 1348. We must keep this date before our minds, because in the year 1346 Boccaccio paid one of his visits to Ravenna, and Pietro dei Giardini claims our very special attention as the source of the information which Boccaccio has collected concerning Dante, as from the living friend who had seen and held constant converse with the poet.

From the same source must have been derived

those personal characteristics which give such interest to his description of Dante. These will be referred to later on, together with the account of the discovery of the missing cantos of the 'Paradiso' in the house of Piero di Giardino—a house much frequented by Dante in his lifetime. No doubt because of the vital interest attached to these statements, and all that they involve, the whole narrative has been the mark for the fiercest darts of destructive criticism; but those who care to follow the comparison of contemporary documents, which have been brought together in the last great work upon the period,¹ will see that the researches of the nineteenth century have gone far to establish the simple statements made by Boccaccio not twenty-five years after the death of Dante, as he had himself received them from the lips of Piero di Giardino, the constant companion and chosen friend of the poet. Nor is contemporary evidence lacking with regard to Menghino Mezzani. He was descended from an ancient family of Mezzano near Ferrara, and was also a notary at Ravenna when Dante arrived there in 1317. Deeds bearing his signature, relating both to the public affairs of the city and the private matters of the citizens, date from that year, and are preserved among the archives. He was, moreover, associated with other learned jurists in revising the statutes of Ravenna. But

¹ 'Ultimo Rifugio,' pp. 204-218. See also Appendix of Documents, p. 412.

as a pupil of Dante in poetry, as Menghino Mezzani the rhymester, he is more interesting to us. Not equal to Guido Novello in imagination, grace, or power of diction, his verses relating to the actual events of the period have great value from a historical point of view. Thrown into prison, after the banishment of Guido Novello, by Bernardino da Polenta, his verses written from his captivity to his friend Antonio da Ferrara give a piteous account of his sufferings. Antonio da Ferrara, on his part, comforts him, and holds out a prospect of escape in a sonnet dedicated to 'Hope':

'My friend, I will thou don that fairest robe
Of Hope, who throws her mantle o'er our globe ;
For if thou wilt not, then I say, Beware !
Know that without it mortal life lies bare.
The solace of mankind, did she not stay
When Faith and Charity had fled away ?
Her sisters, made by wickedness to fly
From cruel earth, to seek the kinder sky.

Ah, who would sojourn in this world of ours,
But for the comfort of her succ'ring powers !
False dost thou call her ? Vain the promised dream !
Strike off the promise—how does life then seem ?
Reason should balance chance, then take the blame.
Deceived ? To her, and not to Hope, be shame.'

The reply of Mezzani has only been preserved in a fragmentary form. But it appears from two preceding sonnets (III., IV.) that their hope

was centred, according to the Ghibelline practice of the period, upon a German deliverer, and in so doing their reason was certainly 'to blame,' for it was a vain illusion to expect anything from that quarter. It is evident that the famous appeal of their master to 'German Albert' was fresh in their remembrance, for it is reproduced word for word in the sonnets which vituperate his successor, Charles of Luxembourg, in Cæsar's seat.

But, like his predecessors, Charles of Luxembourg, laden with the spoils of Italy, returned to Germany, 'more intent,' as the historian says, 'upon robbing Italy of her money than upon healing her divisions';¹ and Menghino Mezzani, like Dante before him, was obliged to seek comfort in the hope that some unknown deliverer, as personified by the famous 'Veltro,' would arise—one who

'Will not life support
By earth, nor its base metals, but by love,
Wisdom and virtue. . . . In his might
Shall safety to Italia's plains arise.'

Inf., i. 101, CARY, Trans.

It was not till the year 1350, at the death of Bernardino da Polenta, that Mezzani obtained his release, and during this captivity, which lasted many years, he had another correspondent of no less importance than Petrarch, whose

¹ Mur., 'Ann. d' Italia,' viii., 291, 292.

sonnet, offering him consolation, and Mezzani's reply, have been preserved in the contemporary MSS. It is also supposed that the allusion is intended for him when Petrarch, in his letter to Boccaccio, refers to

'that old sage of Ravenna who, being fully competent to decide in such matters, assigns to thee the third place in our literature.'¹

The first place had evidently been assigned to Dante, and the second to Petrarch. That he opinion of Mezzani was held in high esteem appears from the testimony of Coluccio Salutati, who, in a letter to a friend, speaks of Mezzani 'as known to have been the friend and companion of Dante.'²

This testimony is of great importance, because not only does it come from a contemporary source, supported by documentary evidence, but there is actually now extant in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris³ a letter from Coluccio Salutati to Mezzani, addressed as follows: 'Eloquentissimi viro domino Menghino Mezano, civi Raven- nati, amico ignoto carissimo.'

The word 'ignoto' shows that they had never known each other personally, nor had they corresponded before this letter, which describes itself as the first writing which had passed between

¹ 'Lett. Sen. di F. Petrarca,' vol. i., pp. 274, 283.

² 'Ult. Rif.' p. 218.

³ MS. Lat. 8572, pp. 25, 26; quoted in the 'Ult. Rif.' p. 232.

them, and to which the reply, if there was any, has not been preserved. But this single letter refers to the testimony of a common friend, Tommaso di Mengardino, from whose lips the writer had heard that Mezzani

'is not less remarkable for his eloquence than for his noble, upright life, and that he is a constant student of the poets and moral writers. To thee' (the letter continues) 'belongs the power which is the gift of the auspicious star under which thou wert born, to discourse of virtue, and to hold in little account those things which most delight mankind.'¹

In another passage this contemporary writer refers to Mezzani's commentary on the 'Inferno' and 'Purgatorio' of Dante,² a work which takes the shape of an epitome rather than a commentary. It has no merit from a literary point of view, as it contributes nothing to the history or explanation of the poem. Nor yet as poetry does it deserve the name, for it is a sort of doggerel paraphrase, taking the opening words of each verse from the original, and completing the explanation of the text after the commentator's own fashion, as for example :

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 235, *et seq.*

² The MS. of this work is extant in the Gambalunga Library at Rimini, and a portion of it in the Bodleian at Oxford. It was commented on by Professor Crescentino Giannini in the 'Biblio filo,' Ann. i., p. 155, and by Luigi Tonini in his pamphlet on 'Francesca da Rimini.'

'Nel mezzo del camin, si trova Dante
 Smarrito fuor di via per selva oscura
 Et le bramose fiere starse avanti,' etc.

Appendix to 'Ult. Rif.', p. 1.

Yet, as a literary curiosity and contemporary work, it is certainly worthy of attention. But the interest which surrounds Mezzani as a friend and companion of Dante culminates in the sonnet addressed to Bernardo Canacci, in which he pours forth eulogies and thanks for the epitaph in honour of his dear master :

'Thine, then, at last the pious tribute laid,
 Messer Bernardo, at our Dante's feet,
 Dearer to him because none else have made,
 Of all his other friends, an offering meet.

'In heaven, amid the saints, you win his praise,
 And mine, who perish in affliction's fire ;
 Such that nor eye nor voice I dare to raise,
 Nor can I serve you as I would desire.

'That which the lowliest of all Dantists, I,
 May not bestow of honour, praise and fame,
 Abashed, I leave to greater minds to try
 How they may celebrate his noble name.

'Through thy device that name can never die,
 Unless, indeed, first die this iron age ;
 Behold thy marble—there where every eye
 Can read the lines from off the solid page,
 Honour thus paid unto the senseless clay
 Of thy great love in life shall fitly say.'

To which Bernardo replied :

‘ Pallas the beautiful ! to thee his eye
Thy troubled votary turns with gasping breath,
And, as the last discomfiture draws nigh,
Through thee more constant meets the approach of
death.

‘ And so St. Lawrence, servant of his God,
Stretched on the bed of pain all patient lay,
And firm as rock the path of sorrow trod,
Nor cast, in cowardice, his crown away.

‘ So felt the Psalmist, who in bitter grief
Prostrate on earth did mourn the livelong night—
The sometime shepherd, who as wolf and thief
Stole Bathsheba from him who fell in fight.

‘ So we of less account, in such-like guise,
Can steadfast stand beneath the storms of fate
Until the end be won, or purpose wise
Complete for those who thus can patient wait.
And so, in dear remembrance of thy praise,
I would revive thy hope, thy spirits raise.’

From these two sonnets we can settle approximately the date of Bernardo Canacci’s ‘Epitaph on Dante,’ and place it about the year 1350, which, looking back from our side of the five hundred years which have elapsed, seems to bring it sufficiently near to the death of the poet to invest it with a very significant interest. But by the surviving contemporaries and friends some such tribute to his memory must have been eagerly expected, and this appears from Mezzani’s sonnet, long before it came.

The concluding lines of that sonnet, which refer to the 'great love in life' entertained by Bernardo Canacci for Dante, establish with certainty the fact of their close and intimate friendship. But there are no other facts concerning Bernardo which can be looked upon as equally certain. Out of many theories respecting him, the probabilities seem to lie in favour of his having belonged to a Bolognese family which had migrated to Ravenna, and that he was one of the many rhymesters of the Romagna called upon by Guido Novello to compete for the honour of composing Dante's epitaph. That he was the successful competitor we have already seen, and in the concluding chapter the epitaph will be given, with further details connected with it. Upon that tribute to the memory of his Master and friend may justly rest the claim of Bernardo Canacci to the notice of posterity.

Such were some of the principal characters in that remarkable group of friends who surrounded Dante during his residence at Ravenna, sympathizing with him in the yearnings of his exile, cheering his solitude, and eagerly watching the progress of his great work, with, probably, little thought that their association with him would confer upon them a share in the immortality of his fame. Yet in that way only can we account for the details of their personality which it has been possible to rescue from oblivion and, after a lapse of more than five centuries, to reinvest with life.

CHAPTER V.

*CLOSING YEARS OF THE LIFE OF DANTE AT
RAVENNA.*

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CLOSING YEARS OF THE LIFE OF DANTE AT RAVENNA.

'Quando mi vidi giunto in quella parte
Di mia età, dove ciascun dovrebbe
Calar le vele e raccoglier le sarte.'

Inf., xxvii. 78-80.

IN the last chapter we have gained some impression of the life at Ravenna contemporary with Dante, and of his own work in the midst of it, which Boccaccio sums up in one of his graceful paragraphs :

'Dante then inhabited Ravenna (having lost all hope, though not the desire, to return to Florence) for some years, under the protection of a kind and benevolent patron, and there by his lectures he instructed many students in the art of poetry, and especially in that of the vulgar tongue; being, in my opinion, as much the first among the Italians to place the language in a proper position, and to give it a due value, as Homer was among the Greeks or Virgil among the Romans. Before him, although it may have been recognised as a language, no one had either the desire or the courage to make it instrumental in composition, save that in

ballads of love and such-like light matters it was sometimes used. But he proved, and effectually proved, that it might be employed when treating of the highest subjects, and thus exalted our vulgar tongue, and made it more glorious than that of any other nation.'¹

Although it is obvious that we must not seek for any reference to the living contemporaries of Dante at Ravenna in the pages of the 'Divina Commedia,' more than one passage proves how deeply his mind was imbued with the past traditions of the city, from the times of Julius Cæsar and the Emperors down to the great families of the Traversari and the Anastagi, over whose recent extinction he deeply grieves, and the outlines of whose tombs must have been as familiar to him as to us. 'Where'—such is the exclamation he puts into the mouth of Guido del Duca—

'Where is good Lizio? where Arrigo Mainardi,
Pier Traversaro² and Guido di Carpigna?'

adding, in the same speech :

'Marvel not, Tuscan, if thou see me weep
When I recall those once-loved names.

* * * * *

With Traversaro's house and Anastagio's
(Each race disherited).'

Purg., xiv. 108.

¹ Boccaccio, 'Vita di Dante,' p. 27.

² Pietro de Traversari a Podestà, in Ravenna in 1177, was a very great character in early Ravennese history. He delivered his

These families, whose names appear in chronicles dating from the fifth century, were extinct, but there were descendants still living of the family of the Onesti, and their hearts may have glowed with pride when they found their name recur in the pages of the 'Paradiso.' First in order comes San Romualdo degli Onesti, born at the beginning of the eleventh century, who founded the Order of the Camaldoiese. Placed by Dante among the contemplative spirits in the seventh heaven, which is the planet Saturn, he is mentioned in the eulogy of St. Benedict :

‘These other flames,
The spirits of men contemplative, were all
Enlivened by that warmth, whose kindly force
Gives birth to flowers and fruits of holiness :
Here is Macarius ; Romualdo here ;
And here my brethren who their steps refrained
Within the cloisters, and held firm their heart.’

Par., xxii. 44, et seq.

Next we have Beato Pietro Onesti, called Il Peccatore, who built, in 1096, the Church of Sta. Maria in Porto Fuori. In the last chapter we referred to the beautiful frescoes which cover the walls of the interior ; the exterior is no less

father out of the hands of the Papal Legate, received the Emperor Frederick on his return from Venice after his humiliation there before Alexander III., made an expedition to the Holy Land, and was buried in the Church of S. Giovanni Battista. The tomb has since been moved into the museum.

interesting. Once on the coast, it now stands in the midst of a green campagna, from which the sea has receded. The curious and rather clumsy campanile rises from the quadrangular base of the old Roman lighthouse of the port whence the church derives its name.

The remains of the founder still rest in the ancient marble sarcophagus under an archway on the left hand of the nave, adorned with the figures of our Saviour and the Apostles in rude relief. Pietro Peccatore must not be confounded with Pier Damiano, another Ravennese saint, born in 1007, who died at Faenza in 1072, and whose life and works are too well known to be recapitulated here. Only it is curious that Dante should himself have foreseen the confusion which has arisen between the two saints, and which he tried to forestall.

Pier Damiano is made by Dante to describe the Monte Catria and the monastery of Fonte Aveliana. This monastery is still to be found nestling under the side of the mountain in the midst of the oak glades watered by ever-flowing springs of limpid clearness, still served by the Benedictine monks in their white habit, though only three represent the brotherhood which once peopled the now silent and deserted cells. Still the room which Dante occupied remains as it was then; and through the same window may be seen the rolling green swards of the base of the Catria, that giant of the Apennines, which may well have

suggested to him the description of the metaphorical Mount of Consolation :

‘Guardai in alto, e vidi le sue spalle
Vestite già de’ raggi del pianeta
Che mena dritto altrui per ogni calle.’

Inf., i. 16.

‘I look’d aloft, and saw his shoulders broad
Already vested with that planet’s beam
Which leads all wanderers safe through every way.’

And in the ‘Purgatorio’ we find the actual mountain named, and the convent described :

‘Twixt either shore
Of Italy, nor distant from thy land,
A stony ridge ariseth ; in such sort
The thunder doth not lift his voice so high.
They call it Catria : at whose foot a cell
Is sacred to the lonely eremite :
For worship set apart, and holy rites.
. There
So firmly to God’s service I adhered,
That, with no costlier viands than the juice
Of olives, easily I passed the heats
Of summer and the winter frosts, content
In heavenward musings. Rich were the returns
And fertile, which that cloister once was used
To render to these heavens ; now ‘tis fallen
Into a waste so empty that ere long
Detection must lay bare its vanity.
Pietro Damiano there was I yclept.’

Par., xxi. 94, *et seq.*

So far Cary's translation is exact, but when he goes on to say,

'Pietro the sinner when before I dwelt
Beside the Adriatic, in the house
Of our blest Lady,'

he makes the very confusion which Dante had tried to anticipate by introducing the personal pronoun (*io*). The original runs thus :

'In quel loci fu' io Pier Damiano
E Pietro Peccatore fu nella casa
Di nostra Donna in sul lido Adriano,'

which should be rendered :

'Pietro Damiano there was I yclept.
Peter the sinner *was the one* who dwelt
Beside the Adriatic, in the house
Of our blest Lady.'

There is one conclusive proof that Pietro Damiano could never have dwelt in the monastery 'beside the Adriatic,' because that monastery was founded twenty-four years after his death by Pietro Peccatore degli Onesti. No one could be better aware of this fact than Dante, who when at Ravenna was the contemporary of San Rainaldo, the esteemed historian of the Church which he had governed for twenty years.¹

Moreover, there were at that time many living descendants of the family of the Onesti, to whom

¹ *Vide ante.*

the sarcophagus of Pietro Peccatore, placed then, as now, in a prominent position in the church which he had founded — 'Di nostra Donna in sul lido Adriano' — was a source of just pride.

Thus, with the past history of the city vividly before his mind, amid the companionship of living contemporaries, who from their association with him have left their mark upon the page of history, in the midst of surroundings less altered, perhaps, by the course of centuries than any other of the cities of Italy associated with his name, we can imagine Dante at Ravenna.

Even at this distance of time we can form some idea of the different aspects of his life. At the Court of Guido Novello it is evident that he filled many functions. In a public capacity he was the trusted counsellor in the affairs of State, and often the Ambassador, chosen on account of his known eloquence, to conduct delicate and difficult negotiations with rival States. On the other hand, in a private capacity, he was the intimate friend, the honoured guest, the revered master in the art of rhetoric and poetry, whose delight it was to guide the natural aptitude and the refined taste of his illustrious pupil. But, besides this close connection with his patron, we have seen that he had a separate independent life, a recognised position as a public instructor of youth in Ravenna, and a house of

his own, provided for him by Guido Novello, the site of which, although conjecture has been busy with suggestions, has not yet been identified with certainty.

It is time now to speak of his family. By his marriage in 1292, two years after the death of Beatrice, with Gemma dei Donati, the lady at the window, whose compassionate glance appealed to his broken heart,¹ he had six children. Of these Alighiero and Eliseo died of the plague in childhood. Imperia, the eldest daughter, became the wife of Tano di Bencivenni Pantaleoni; the remaining three children—two sons, Pietro and Jacopo, and one daughter, Beatrice—shared their father's exile.² To Pietro we have already had occasion to refer, because certain dates connected with the two ecclesiastical benefices, San Simone di Muro and Sta. Maria di Zenzanigola,³ which he held in Ravenna, are of great importance in fixing the date of the arrival of Dante in the city. Pietro was a lawyer of considerable reputation and fortune in Verona, where he filled several important offices of the State. Thence he came to join his father in Ravenna. The benefices which he held there did not involve in his case, any more than in that of

¹ 'Vita Nuova,' xxxvi. :

'Sicchè tutta pietade pare in lei raccolta.'

² 'Dante e il suo Secolo,' p. 68.

³ San Simone di Muro, because built on the wall of the city; Sta. Maria di Zenzanigola, from the name of the street which exists to this day.

Jacopo, who held a canonry in the parish of S. Giorgio at Verona, the necessity of taking Holy Orders.

Jacopo, the elder of the two brothers, who had shared to a certain extent his father's political career in Florence, was included in the decree of November 6, 1315, which renewed for the fourth time the sentence of banishment, and being also included in the pardon, offered two years later to the illustrious exile, he shared in his indignant refusal to return to Florence on the terms offered to him.

It was the custom in Florence, on the feast-day of the patron saint (San Giovanni), to pardon a few of the condemned criminals, offering them, so to speak, before the altar of the saint, lighted taper in hand, and remitting the sentence to a fine. In that year, 1317, it was decreed, probably for the first time, that political offenders might be admitted to the same privilege, and the offer was made to Dante. His reply has been fortunately preserved to us, and whatever doubts may have been cast upon the authenticity of some of his letters, as to this one both external and internal evidence declare it to be his own.

'Is this,' he asks with a scorn worthy of the epithet 'Alma Sdegnosa,' which he confers upon himself in his poem¹—'is this the triumphant recall of Dante Alighieri to his country after nearly fifteen years of unmerited

¹ 'Inf.' viii. 44.

exile? Is this the reward of an innocence patent to all, whoever they may be, of continued labour and study in the sweat of the brow? Be far from a man conversant with philosophy the mere thought of a baseness proper only to the heart of a churl, that he, like Ciolo¹ and his companions of evil renown, should be as some prisoner ransomed from just condemnation.

'Be it far from a man who has once held the scales of justice, that he, the injured party, should pay the fine to his injurers, as to those entitled to receive it. . . . Not in this way will I return to my country; but if, O my father,² through thee, or through others, another way could be found which will compromise neither the honour nor the fame of Dante, in that way I will at once set myself. For if I cannot re-enter Florence by an honourable path, I will not re-enter it at all. And forsooth in whatever corner of the world I may find myself, can I not behold the sun and the stars? Can I not beneath any portion of the canopy of heaven meditate upon the highest, sweetest truth, unless I make myself a man of no renown, if not, indeed, one dishonoured in the face of the people and the city of Florence? Nor, I am confident, shall I ever want for bread.'³

The rest of the letter is lost, but the fragment cited, copied in Boccaccio's handwriting, is to be seen in the Laurenziana Library, and

¹ Probably some well-known criminal of the time.

² The Florentine friend to whom this letter was addressed is supposed by Balbo to have been *Fra Moricone*, the Prior of the Monastery of *Fonte Avellana*; but there are also other theories respecting it ('*Vita di Dante*', vol. ii., p. 282).

³ *Epistola x.*, 'All' amico Fiorentino,' *Opere Minore*, vol. iii., p. 501.

it is commented upon by him in his Life of Dante :

‘Oh, noble scorn of a magnanimous soul ! how powerful was thy influence in withstanding thy eager desire to return, if such return could only be accomplished by means unworthy of a man nourished in the school of philosophy !’¹

The decree of exile and the offer of pardon did not touch Pietro, who had taken no part in politics ; but his indignation was the same as that of his brother Jacopo, and even after his father’s death he never re-entered Florence, nor, although the names of the two brothers appear conjointly in the deeds, did he take any personal part in the division of the patrimony, which Jacopo, availing himself of a later pardon in 1323, sued for and obtained as an act of clemency from the Florentine Duke of Athens.

Although there is scarcely any record of their intercourse with their father during the years they shared his exile, they must have been admitted into his full confidence respecting his great work, a portion of it being still to be seen in the handwriting of Pietro in the rare MS. preserved in the museum at Ravenna, while upon Jacopo devolved the task of recovering the lost cantos of the ‘Paradiso,’ and of addressing the completed work to Guido Novello, as will be shown in the last chapter.

¹ Boccaccio, ‘Vita di Dante,’ p. 12.

But the entire reticence on the part of Dante himself respecting his family relationships is an accepted fact. There was no exception made, and there is no ground for supposing that the vituperation which Boccaccio has heaped upon Gemma, his wife, originated with Dante. She may or may not have been the Xantippe depicted by the practised hand of that prince of narrators. No word upon the subject fell from the lips of Dante himself.

On the other hand, there is no word of praise, or even any mention of her after she became his wife, no allusion to her in any of his writings, and it is certain that she did not share his exile. This absolute silence, this proud reserve, shows all the more strongly by contrast with the outpouring of the stream of his strong affection, the expression of every tender thought the human heart is capable of, with reference to Beatrice, a devotion which, far from being weakened, seemed only to gain strength with the lapse of years, and which finds expression in the latest utterances of his poetic genius. His youngest daughter bore her name, and was with her father at Ravenna.

It is not surprising that this fact should have suggested to modern art a most inspiring theme, and that it should have commanded the utmost skill of poet, novelist and dramatist in clothing it with all the grace and pathos imaginable. But at present, till more research has cast further light

upon the subject, we must be content with the fact that her presence at Ravenna is proved by the circumstance of her entering the Convent of San Stefano degli Ulivi after her father's death, and that there Boccaccio found her when he brought her, in 1353, the pension of ten gold florins, whereby Florence, too late, endeavoured to repair an irreparable act of injustice.

The archives of Or San Michele still preserve the following entry :

'Sept., 1350. A. M. Giov. di Bocchacio fiorini dici
d' oro perchè gli desse a Suora Beatrice figliuola di
Dante Alighieri, Monaca nel Monistero di S. Stefano
dell' Uliva di Ravenna.'¹

To this visit of Boccaccio to Ravenna we owe the sketch of Dante's life. It forms the prefix to the famous commentary delivered first of all in the form of lectures, when he was appointed by the Government of Florence the first public exponent of the 'Divina Commedia,' in the Church of San Stefano at Florence, in 1373. But to return to the sketch of the life. It was, as he tells us in his preface, intended as a slight amends to the memory of Dante for his exile, and the lack of any monument in Florence. He wished to supply with his poor faculty of writing the honours which the commonwealth had refused to the noblest of her sons.

¹ 'Ult. Rif.,' p. 214.

‘And therefore, being myself of the same city, although my citizenship is but the smallest fraction when set by the side of the large nobility and virtue of Dante Alighieri, yet as each fellow-citizen is under a solemn obligation to celebrate his great fame, and that which the city ought to have done magnificently not having been done, I, though unworthy to undertake the task, will with my poor ability endeavour to do, not, indeed, with a statue or a gorgeous sepulchre, for neither would be in my power, but with my pen, all unequal though it may be to such a theme, in order that it may not be said among strange countries that our nation is unworthy of such a poet. And I will write in the Florentine idiom, because it will agree with that which he employed in the greater part of his works, things which his modesty forbade him to speak of ; that is to say, the nobility of his birth, his life, studies, and habits, gathering together in one the works of his composition, the which he has himself made so clear to posterity that perhaps my exposition will serve rather to obscure than elucidate them further. Not that such is my wish or my intention, being content to abide in this, as in other things, by the judgment of those wiser than myself, and to be corrected by them.’

Passing by that portion of the sketch which relates to the early life and career of its great subject, we will turn to those personal characteristics which must have been derived from Piero di Giardini, who was still living when Boccaccio arrived in Ravenna.¹

¹ *Vide ante*, p. 112.

‘Our poet was of middle stature, and as soon as he had reached middle life had a habit of stooping when he walked. His carriage was grave and dignified ; his dress simple, suitable to his time of life and adapted to his advancing years. His face was long, the nose aquiline ; the eyes large, rather than small ; the jaw massive, and the under lip projected somewhat ; the complexion dark, and the hair and beard thick, dark and curling ; the expression always thoughtful and melancholy. On this account it happened that one day in Verona (the fame of his works having spread everywhere, and particularly that part of the “Divina Commedia” entitled the “Inferno,” which was well known to numbers of men and women), as he passed by a doorway where many women were congregated, one of them, in a low voice, but sufficiently loud to be heard by himself and by the person who was with him, said to the other women : “Look at him ! That is the man who goes down to hell, and returns when he likes and brings to us up here tidings of those who are down there.” To which one of the other women replied, with the utmost simplicity : “No doubt thou art speaking the truth, because dost not see how his hair is black and singed, and his face bronzed with all the heat and the smoke there is below ?” And he, hearing these words ejaculated behind him, and perceiving that they were uttered by the women in simple faith, pleased and content that such should be their opinion, smiled to himself and passed on. Both in public and private life his manner was always composed and sedate, with invariable courtesy towards all men.

‘He was most temperate both as to eating and drinking, never eating but at the regular times, and never more than was necessary ; nor did he ever show any

greediness in the choice either of food or drink ; and, although he appreciated delicate fare, he lived for the most part on common and ordinary food, greatly blaming those who made luxurious food and its special preparation their study, declaring that such people did not eat to live, but lived, instead, to eat. No one was more vigilant in study, allowing no other care or interest to contend with it, so much so as to cause grief to his wife and family before they became accustomed to his habits, when they accepted it as a matter of course. He seldom spoke, unless directly addressed, and when he did speak it was with a voice and manner exactly measured and adapted to the matter in hand, although when the occasion required his eloquence was rich and abundant, fluent also, and with careful distinct enunciation.

‘ In his youth he took great delight in songs and melodies, and attached himself to anyone who had made himself famous as a rhymester or minstrel ;¹ and the result of this delight showed itself in compositions adapted for melody, which were so arranged by his minstrel friends. How much he was influenced by the tender passion of love has already been clearly shown, and it is universally believed that this passion was the main incentive to his becoming first of all a rhymester in the vulgar tongue, and then, urged by the desire to give solemnity to the declaration of his passion and to gain subsequent fame, he diligently perfected himself in the use of it till he had not only outstripped all his contemporaries, but he so greatly improved and developed it that many at the time and many since have desired and succeeded in becoming experts in it. He preferred to be alone and to live a solitary life, in order that his

¹ *Casella, ‘Purg.’* ii. 91.

contemplations might be uninterrupted ; and if some thought suddenly struck him, he being at that time in the company of others, he would remain silent and abstracted, no matter what question was put to him or what observation made, until he had either concluded his meditation or dismissed it from his mind ; this would often happen either when at table or when walking with his companions, and they desired to take another way. His studies he pursued with unremitting assiduity, and no new occurrence was ever allowed to alter or displace the time allotted to them. It is said by those worthy of credence, that being one day in Sienna, in front of the booth of an apothecary, and a book having been brought to him which had for a long time been promised to him—a book much thought of by the learned men of the time, but never having been seen by him—and having by chance no place where he could take it away to study it, there upon the bench outside the booth where he stood, he placed himself, with the book before him, and began to read it with such avidity that, although on account of a general feast-day in Sienna there was a joust and tournament going on before his eyes, accompanied with the clash of weapons and armour, the sound of various musical instruments, and the shouts of the people—to say nothing of the accompaniments of the feast, such as the dancing of beautiful women, and deeds of prowess and skill on the part of the young men—he was never seen to stir or to lift his eyes once from the book ; and having placed himself there at nones, it was not till after vespers that, having read the book through, and having made himself thoroughly master of it, he rose from his seat. On being asked how he could refrain from looking at the gay spectacle in front of him, he re-

plied that he had not been even aware of it, and so to the first wonder was added a second for his questioners to ruminate upon.

‘He was, moreover, a poet of marvellous genius, of sound memory, and keen intellect—so much so that, when in Paris, assisting at a discussion, “*De quolibet*,” a subject at that time much debated in the schools of theology, fourteen questions were put to him by different men of great learning upon different points, with the arguments for and against on either side, he, without a moment’s hesitation, gathered them together, and, in their order as they had been put to him, replied to them one by one in the same order, with much subtlety meeting and confuting the arguments on the contrary side, the which thing was looked upon as a miracle by the bystanders.

‘To the loftiness of his thought and the subtlety of his inventive faculty his own works, rather than my words, bear sufficient testimony. He longed for honour and fame, perhaps more than was altogether consistent with the nobility of his character. But, on the other hand, what spirit is there so altogether humble as to be insensible to the allurements of fame? And it was, I believe, on account of this longing that he preferred the study of poetry, perceiving that as philosophy was superior to all other studies, its excellence could only be understood by the few, and that there existed already in the world many famous philosophers; whereas in the case of poetry it was easy to all to understand and delight in it, yet of poets they were few and far between. Therefore, hoping by means of poetry to attain to the almost obsolete and distinguished honour of the laurel crown, he gave himself up both to the study and com-

position of the art. And certainly his desire would have been fulfilled had fortune been favourable to him, and had he been able to return to Florence, where alone, at the Font of San Giovanni, would he have accepted the laurel crown — there where he had received the first name to take the second in the act of coronation. But thus it fell out, that, although his merit was sufficiently great to have enabled him to claim anywhere the honour of the laurel crown (which does not, of itself, increase knowledge, being but the seal and adornment of it), yet that falling out which never should have been, he waited in vain, and, refusing every other offer, died without the much-coveted honour.¹

Such is the outline of the portrait traced by the first biographer of Dante. Popular tradition has added, in the form of anecdote, a few characteristic touches. One of these relates how that

¹ Later on in the same work Boccaccio makes a divergence to treat of this custom, and gives three reasons for the choice of the laurel, because the laurel amongst others has three especial properties: 'The first, we can see for ourselves it is evergreen; the second, it is impervious to the bolt of the thunder and the blast of the lightning, in which it differs from all other trees; the third, it is odoriferous with the sweetest perfume—this we can also perceive for ourselves. These three properties were reckoned by the ancients, from whom the custom is derived, to mark its fitness for celebrating the merit of the poet and the victory of the commander. First, because the perpetual green of the leaves demonstrates the undying fame of their deeds, those who have been crowned, or who ever will be crowned, being thereby rendered immortal. Secondly, their fame is so surely established as to be impervious to the blast of envy and the destructive power of time, which consumes everything. Thirdly, to show that all deeds of fame can never, in the course of years, lose their enchantment for reader and listener alike, but, being always acceptable and full of charm, are in their perpetual sweetness like the leaves of the laurel.'—'Vita di Dante,' pp. 52, 53.

Dante, in one day's journey, passed through Lugo, where he was cheated and given short measure by a mercer; through Fusignano, where he was made to pay an unjust tax; through Bagnacavallo, where he was insulted by the people. Recapitulating in his evening orisons the three outrages of the day, he is said to have exclaimed :

‘A statera Luci, a justitia Fusignani et ab infami plebe Balneocaballi libera nos Domine.’

‘From the standard of the Lughese, from the injustice of the Fusignanese, and from the insults of the men of Bagnacavallo, deliver us, O Lord.’

The tradition remains among the people of Bagnacavallo to such an extent that, when any one embarks in a search for hidden treasures or antiquities, they are derided for ‘searching after the bones of Dante's ass.’ The poor animal which carried the poet that day was so ill-treated, while its master, the Ghibelline passing through Guelph territory, was insulted, that it died shortly afterwards, and was buried at Bagnacavallo.

A second anecdote is important, because it has reference to what is called the ‘Credo’ of Dante, which, although pronounced by modern criticism to be apocryphal, has hitherto been printed with the minor works of Dante. It was originally published in the fifteenth century in Latin, in the modern spelling, and translated into Italian by

Quadrio.¹ Confronted again with the original MS.² by Rigoli, who discovered corroboration in no less than twelve original MSS. of the fourteenth century, and acquired a 'terzina' in this process, which had never been printed before,³ the 'Credo' was placed by him at the head of a collection of rhymes by various great writers,⁴ with the following introduction :

'It would not be possible to open our collection with a more illustrious name. Dante stands first, both on account of his fame and because of the chronological order which we propose to adopt in the disposition of our material. We therefore start with his "Profession of Faith," which contains the Apostles' Creed, the Exposition of the Sacrament, and the Decalogue, the enumeration of the deadly sins, the Paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer, and the Ave Maria in "terza rima."'⁵

Although, as a matter of poetry, it has no extraordinary merit, yet on account of the terse and pellucid exposition of the faith as Dante believed it, showing exactly what his tenets were even with respect to the observance of Sunday,⁶ it

¹ Author of 'Storia e Ragione di Ogni Letteratura,' a standard work.

² Codice 1,011 della Riccardiana.

³ 'Masol di quell' eterno,' etc., xxvi.

⁴ 'Saggio di Rime di diversi buoni Autori.'

⁵ 'Il Canzoniere di Dante Alighieri,' etc., Da Pietro Fraticelli.

⁶ 'Il Terzo si è, che ciascun si riposa

D'ogni fatica un dì nella settimana

Siccome Santa Chiesa aperto pose.'

The commandment is called the *third* instead of the fourth, because the first and second are made into one.

is to be hoped that the further researches in contemplation will remove all doubt that it was indeed his work. Moreover, the origin of the composition is not a little interesting. The story is as follows:

There dwelt in Ravenna a learned friar of the minor order, who was an inquisitor, and hearing much talk of this Dante, he determined 'in his heart to know him so that he might see whether in truth he erred from the faith of Christ; and one morning, when Dante was in a church to worship our Lord, this inquisitor arrived in the same church, and Dante was pointed out to him. Then the inquisitor caused him to be summoned. Dante approached him with reverence. The inquisitor then asked, "Art thou that Dante who sayest that thou hast passed through hell, purgatory and paradise?" And Dante replied, "I am Dante Alighieri of Florence." And the inquisitor went on angrily, "Thou makest songs and sonnets and such-like rubbish. Thou wouldst have done far better to write a grammar, and have been content to rest on the foundations of the Church of God, giving no heed to such inventions, which may one day bring thee the reward that thou meritest." And Dante making as if he would reply to this, the inquisitor said, "This is not the time; but on such a day we will meet, for I wish to investigate these things." Dante then answered that this would be most agreeable to him, and, leaving the inquisitor, retired to his room.

There he wrote the treatise which is called the "Little Creed," the which is a complete affirmation of the creed of Christ. Having shown this to the inquisitor, it seemed to him a very remarkable production, and he knew not any more what to say to Dante.'

A third anecdote is cited as valuable evidence that Dante gave public instruction in Ravenna. It is said that, while these lectures were being delivered, another of the Ravennese doctors said to a student who was praising the science of Dante, 'You speak of the science of a rogue,' adding, 'Because Dante has said everything worthy of fame and remembrance in his poems, and has left nothing for anyone else to say, therefore he is a rogue.'

The fourth and last shows the unfailing readiness of his wit. One day, at the Court of Guido da Polenta, a courtier, perceiving that Dante, silent and grave, as was his wont, kept aloof from the company, never ceased persecuting him with questions as to what was the matter—what was he thinking about?

'I was wondering,' replied Dante, 'which was the greatest beast in the world.'

'Oh!' said his tormentor, 'don't rack your brains any more about that, for I can tell you. The elephant is the greatest beast in the world.'

'Then,' replied Dante immediately, 'dear

Mr. Elephant, do leave me alone and attend to your own affairs.'

These anecdotes are preserved in Ravenna with as much care as the tradition which indicates the path, called the Viale de' Poeti, or del Poeta, taken by Dante on his way to the Pine Forest.

CHAPTER VI.

*THE PINETA—EMBASSY TO VENICE—DEATH AND
BURIAL.*

CHAPTER VI.

THE PINETA—EMBASSY TO VENICE—DEATH AND BURIAL.

‘La divina Foresta spessa e viva.’
Purg., xxviii. 1, 2.

IF, from the Latin correspondence, it is reasonable to suppose that the ‘Paradiso’ was mainly written at Ravenna, the description of the ‘divina Foresta spessa e viva’ in the ‘Purgatorio’ leaves no room for doubt that the Pine Forest at Ravenna must have inspired that passage, and that there, and nowhere else, could it have been written.

It has been ably argued, in the paper already alluded to, by Mr. Gladstone, when enumerating probabilities in favour of Dante’s visit to Oxford, that he must have had personal cognizance of the places he described. For example, when he narrates the journey of Cæsar up the Rhone it is through his own personal experience of the place. Again, the cities of Flanders are named by him, because he saw them in his journey further North,

and so on till he reaches England, adding touches of local interest which could only have been obtained by a personal knowledge of the spot.

This argument is still more forcible when applied, not to a city or a place, but to some passing phenomenon of Nature or sudden effect. How, for example, if he had not himself witnessed it, could Dante have described the appearance of the Tower of Cariscenda, which, if the clouds behind it are travelling in the direction contrary to the inclination of the tower, make it seem about to fall ?¹

‘ As appears
 The Tower of Cariscenda, from beneath
 Where it doth lean, if chance a passing cloud
 So sail across, that opposite it hangs,
 Such then Antæus seemed, as at mine ease
 I marked him stooping.’

CARY, *Trans.*

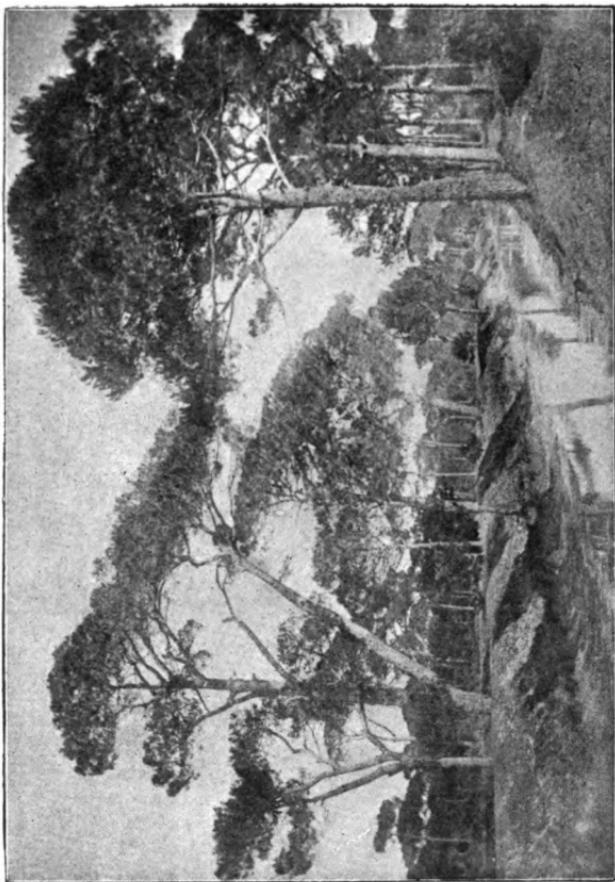
Or, again, the gentle fall of the snow in the silence of a mountain pass,² or the sudden rising and spreading of the mist till the whole landscape was blotted out, if he had not himself beheld the phenomena while passing the Apennines in the early winter ?

In a similar way, only more forcible still, the forest in the ‘Purgatorio’ is a living picture of the Pineta at Ravenna, and has been referred to in this sense in all the commentaries, most notably in that of Benvenuto da Imola.³

¹ ‘Inf.’ xxxi. 136, 141.

³ ‘Comentum,’ iv. 161, 162.

² ‘Purg.’ xxx. 85.



It is not only the rustle of the pines and the song of the birds which, in the poem, exactly describe the great forest at Ravenna. The picture is a facsimile in all its details, and proves how profound was the impression upon the mind of Dante. No point of note escapes him when, in the 'Purgatorio,' he paints from the life the tall, rugged trunks, often in straight rows like the aisles of an ancient basilica, with branches reaching out from side to side, interlacing each other, making shelter alike from heat and storm, and penetrated by an even, tempered light. Below, an undergrowth of myrtle and juniper, as if rejoicing in the protection overhead, spreads itself over a carpet of moss, broken here and there by little clumps of flowering shrubs and sweet-smelling flowers. Here is the first picture of it in the lines:

‘Vago già di cercar dentro e dintorno,
La divina Foresta spessa e viva.’

Purg., xxviii. 1.

‘Through that celestial forest, whose thick shade
With lively greenness the new springing day
Attempered, eager now to roam, and search
Its limits round, forthwith I left the bank.’

Like a curtain of green velvet, the thick crests of the pines break the blast of the wind so effectually that it cannot bluster in the sheltered aisles of the mysterious forest, and only reaches the traveller with a force as mitigated as that of the

light. And when the sirocco blows from the south-east the pines on the coast turn towards the west, and through their needle foliage passes a sweet murmur as of an Æolian harp :

‘Tal, qual di ramo in ramo si raccoglie
Per la Pineta in sul lito di Chiassi,
Quando Eölo Scirocco fuor discioglie.’

Purg., xxviii. 19-21.

‘Even as from branch to branch,
Along the piny forests on the shore
Of Chiassi, rolls the gathering melody,
When Eolus hath from his cavern loosed
The dripping south.’

CARY, *Trans.*

The birds which, by a natural instinct, have sought refuge in this evergreen arcade, undisturbed by the storm, sing on in ceaseless melody :

‘Non però dal lor esser dritto sparte
Tanto, che gli augelletti per le cime
Lasciassero d’ operare ogni lor arte :
Ma con piena letizia l’ aure prime,
Cantando, riceveano intra le foglie,
Che tenevan bordone alle sue rime.’

Ibid., 13-18.

‘Upon their top the feathered quiristers
Applied their wonted art, and with full joy
Welcomed those hours of prime, and warbled shrill
• Amid the leaves, that to their jocund lays
Kept tenor.’

CARY, *Trans.*

Then we have the description of the canals which, at regular intervals, intersect the dense regions of the great forest, carrying their limpid waters to the sea, their banks lined with fresh herbage :

‘Già m’ avean trasportato i lenti passi
 Dentro all’ antica selva tanto, ch’ io
 Non potea riveder dond’ io m’ entrassi :
 Ed ecco l’ andar più mi tolse un rio,
 Che inver sinistra con sue piccole onde
 Piegava l’ erba che in sua ripa uscìo.
 Tutte l’ acque, che son di quà più monde,
 Parrieno avere in sè mistura alcuna
 Verso di quella, che nulla nasconde,
 Avvegna chè si muova bruna bruna
 Sotto l’ ombra perpetua, che mai
 Raggiar non lascia Sole ivi, nè Luna.
 Coi più ristetti e con gli occhi passai
 Di là dal fumicello, per mirare
 La grande variazion de’ freschi mai.’

Ibid., 22-36.

‘ Already had my steps,
 Though slow, so far into that ancient wood
 Transported me, I could not ken the place
 Where I had entered, when behold ! my path
 Was bounded by a rill, which to the left
 With little rippling waters bent the grass,
 That issued from the brink. On earth no wave
 How clean soe’er, that would not seem to have
 Some mixture in itself, compared with this,
 Transpicuous, clear ; yet darkly on it rolled,
 Darkly beneath perpetual gloom, which ne’er

Admits or sun or moon light there to shine.
 My feet advanced not; but my wondering eyes
 Passed onward, o'er the streamlet, to survey
 The tender May-bloom, flushed through many a hue,
 In prodigal variety.'

CARY, *Trans.*

No one who had ever visited the spot could fail to recognise in the 'divina Foresta spessa e viva' of the terrestrial paradise the characteristics of the Pine Forest at Ravenna, and one glance back at the Latin eclogue of Giovanni del Virgilio, while confirming Dante's description, will show how familiar these were also to his correspondent.¹

This conjunction of testimony would lead one to suppose that the concluding cantos of the 'Purgatorio,' as well as the whole of the 'Paradiso,' were composed in the cool, mysterious shade of the forest to the melodious accompaniment of the rustling pines and ceaseless song of the birds.

To this period also belong those minor works of Dante—the 'Credo,' already referred to, and the 'Paraphrase of the Seven Penitential Psalms.' This paraphrase, though, of course, lacking in the power and vigour which characterize the original work of Dante, has caught the spirit of the writer, prompted probably by the same feelings, that appeal from the injustice of men to the justice of God, which inspired the psalmist, and the

¹ *Vide ante*, Chapter IV., p. 104.

passionate yearnings which, in the hour of anguish, have gone up from many and many a sorrow-laden soul.

Here and there we find thrown in many a little personal touch relating to his own life, shortcomings, and bent of mind. These are to be found especially in Psalm V., and still more in the *De Profundis*, which is the most masterly paraphrase of all.

From the calm solitudes where he pursued occupations of this nature, and from a corresponding state of thought, Dante was suddenly called upon by his patron, Guido Novello, to appear once more in the public capacity of an Ambassador from Ravenna to Venice ; and this is the last important act of his life.

Needless to say that the closing event of such a career has proved the last citadel round which every storm of criticism, assertion, and counter-assertion has raged, and will rage till further and renewed investigation has settled the points of dispute. Meanwhile the facts can only be restated as they have hitherto stood, together with the arguments for and against the letter, supposed to have been written from Venice by Dante to Guido da Polenta. Boccaccio makes no allusion to the Embassy to Venice. After the sentence in which he describes the life of Dante at Ravenna as being chiefly spent in giving instruction to his scholars in the art of poetry in the *lingua volgare*,¹

¹ See Chapter IV.

he passes at once to that hour appointed to all men which came also to Dante. Only in so far as the date which he assigns tallies with the period of the return from Venice does the testimony of Boccaccio throw any light upon the vexed question. It is upon the narrative of Villani, supported by Manetti, that biographers have hitherto rested for their statements. The chronicle of Villani records that Dante died

'in the city of Ravenna in the Romagna, on his return from his Embassy to Venice on behalf of the Signori da Polenta, with whom he lived.'¹

Then follow further particulars, from which we gather the motive of the Embassy. A dispute had arisen between Venice and Ravenna; a Venetian ship had been attacked by the Ravennese, the captain killed, and many of the crew wounded. The Venetians, furious, quickly determined on reprisal. They made an alliance with the Ordelaffi at Forlì, promising to supply funds to the amount of 3,000 golden florins to raise and equip troops so as to make immediate war upon Ravenna, and, in return for their support, they were to receive a free supply of salt and grain while the war lasted. They laid their grievance before the Malatesta of Rimini, relating the offence committed in time of peace against the Republic by Guido da Polenta and the commune of Ravenna. As a protest against such an outrage they summoned Pandolfo

¹ 'Storie,' lib. ix., c. xxxiv.

to withdraw his alliance from Ravenna, and to refuse the passage through Rimini of any force sent to the assistance of Ravenna, under pain of being considered the enemy of Venice. Cesena, Imola, and Faenza received similar instructions from the incensed Republic. Meanwhile the Ordelaffi lost no time in responding to the Venetian proposals, promising at once to attack Ravenna with all the infantry they could muster, as well as to supply two hundred cavalry within the first and three hundred within the second month, 'in order to defeat that city, the enemy of Venice, with force and valour, to the utter loss and destruction of the same until she sued for peace or a truce.'

Ravenna, thus threatened on all sides by a combination of enemies, one of whom alone would have sufficed for her destruction, had no time to lose in pacifying her enraged adversary, and Guido da Polenta decided to despatch an immediate Embassy to Venice to avert the impending storm. Nor was there any hesitation in his choice of Dante as the principal Ambassador, not only on account of his learning and well-known powers of rhetoric, but because of his diplomatic experience in former embassies, his previous relationship with the Ordelaffi family, who shared his politics, and one of whom, Scarpetta, he had served as secretary (1307-8). Matters having reached this threatening crisis, delay was dangerous, and the Ambassadors must

have left Venice in the last days of August. Although no document has yet been found in the Venetian archives relative to the arrival of this first Embassy from Ravenna, the documents which do exist are as follows :

I. August 11, 1321. The determination of the Maggior Consiglio as to a rupture of all negotiation between Venice and Ravenna.

II. August 17, 1321. The despatch of the Venetian Ambassador, Niccolò di Marsilio, by Doge Giovanni Soranzo to Cecco degli Ordelaffi to solicit his alliance.

III. August 22, 1321. The reply, as cited, of Cecco degli Ordelaffi.

Another document, that of October 20, the same year, one month after the death of Dante, relates to the *second* Embassy despatched from Ravenna, in which there is plain and distinct allusion to the previous Embassy. This had evidently resulted in the preliminaries of a peace, the provisions of which were carried a stage further by the second Embassy. The reply of the Doge and the Council leaves no room for doubt upon the matter.

' You already know ' (these are the terms in which it is couched), ' both from ourselves and our commissioners, that it is our intention to live in peace with the community of Ravenna, but because you have *already said*, and say now, that you are not empowered to reply, go back for your instructions and return, either yourselves, or let others return in your stead, with an arranged con-

tract and agreement, ready to be signed, and the negotiations will proceed in such a manner as to put a stop to all discord, and peace will again reign. Meanwhile it will be well that the Ravennese restore what they have taken, and we will do the same. As to the proclamation of peace, go back to Ravenna and proclaim it both in regard to ourselves and to our allies, especially the Ordelaffi.'

Two things are clear from this document, which fortunately has been preserved. In the first place, that there had been a previous Embassy, the date of which may be fixed somewhere between the last days of August and the first of September. Secondly, that that Embassy—the Embassy of Dante—had been a successful preliminary measure. It would seem as if either a truce or a peace had been proposed by Dante; that the Venetians had not shown themselves averse to either, but had demanded concrete proposals. Therefore a second Embassy had arrived from Ravenna in October to suggest that Venice should take the initiative and draw up the articles of the treaty. To this the Doge and Council replied as we have seen, and this was transcribed as a preliminary compact in the Venetian archives. The result, then, of the Embassy of Dante was success, though he did not live to see the treaty signed.

We must now consider the letter from Venice. It is No. viii. among the Latin epistles.¹ The

¹ 'Il Convito di Dante e le Epistole,' Fraticelli, p. 431.

title: 'Al Magnifico Messer Guido da Polenta, Signor di Ravenna.' The date March 30, 1314.

Whether or not this is a genuine letter—and at present the arguments remain equally balanced—can only be decided by some fresh discovery. It first saw the light in 1547, being published in a volume entitled, 'Prose Antiche di Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio,' etc., collected by a certain Anton Francesca Doni. Whereas the other Latin epistles can be confronted with original MSS., in the case of this one, up to the present time, the MS. is lacking. The initial difficulty as to the date, 1314 instead of 1321, can be disposed of in two ways: either that it is a mistaken figure, which seems to be the opinion of Balbo,¹ or that it belongs to another of the occasions when Dante was sent on an Embassy to Venice. Possibly it belongs to the complimentary visit of congratulation despatched from Ravenna to Venice on the occasion of the election of the Doge Giovanni Soranzo, 1314, which seems suggested by the internal evidence of the document. However that may be, the greater part of the letter consists of an indignant protest because, having begun his oration in Latin, he was told to desist because the language was not understood by the Venetians in council assembled; and the second attempt to address them in his mother-tongue was attended with as little success. Nor was their ignorance to be wondered at, considering their Greco-Dal-

¹ Balbo, 'Vita di Dante,' vol. ii., p. 331.

matian origin. Then follows a request to Guido never to send him again on a similar Embassy, which could neither add to his own reputation nor be productive of any satisfaction or consolation to his patron. The letter concludes with the paragraph :

‘ I shall stay here a few days to feast my bodily eyes, which are naturally enchanted with the novelty and beauty of this spot, and shall then return to the sweet haven of my retirement, surrounded with the benign protection of your princely courtesy.’¹

We must accept with some reserve the statements in the chronicle of Villani that the Venetians purposely refused to listen to Dante, fearing that the power of his eloquence might deter them from the revenge for which they thirsted ; also that they would not send him back under escort in one of their ships to Ravenna, lest the same dreaded eloquence should convert the Venetian Admiral and corrupt the fleet. This seems scarcely probable, although it is not unnatural that Villani should omit no touch in his narrative which might enhance the reputation of Dante as an orator. It is more likely that he took the return journey by land to escape any vexation by the Venetian fleet. We must also bear in mind that the road along the coast was the accepted highway and post communication between the Marches, the Romagna, and Venice, and con-

¹ ‘ Le Epistole,’ viii., p. 482.

tinued to be so up to the close of the last century. The treacherous waves of the Adriatic and sudden fierce storms were too well known to the dwellers on the coast to make it a chosen method of communication between Ravenna and Venice. The very Venetian soldiers were ordinarily despatched by land, the Castle of Marcabò having been built as a fortress to command the land access. There was also the question of time; the Embassy was obliged to return without delay to lay before Guido Novello the proposals upon which the safety of the State depended. It was not likely that in such an emergency they would expose themselves to a delay of possibly twenty days on a journey by sea which could be accomplished by land in three or four. We may, then, imagine the route pursued by Dante and his fellow-Ambassadors. They would probably have gone by boat along the shores of Malamocco, Pelestrina, and Chioggia, past the great Murazzi, or sea-walls of Venice, and possibly the sunset over the Lagune, with the soft haze upon the Euganean Hills, would have brought to a close the journey of the first day. The next day, passing through the delta of the Po by means of the huge flat-bottomed boats or rafts which then, as now, formed a means of communication, they would reach in the evening the magnificent Benedictine Abbey of Pomposa, whose tall tower, glittering with majolica and terra-cotta, must have been a welcome sight to the weary travellers. Probably there, as at the

Fonte Avellana on Monte Catria, the Benedictine Fathers came out in their white robes to welcome the illustrious Embassy on its return journey. Pursuing their way with the morning light, the travellers would thread through the Lagunes of Comacchio, and, keeping to the long sandy strip of shore, would cross the Lamone, and enter the northern extremity of the Pineta. Thence through the deep, unbroken silence of the forest, beneath the sheltering shade of the protecting pines, with the velvet sward beneath his feet, Dante paced his last steps, 'nel cammin di nostra vita,' perhaps in that sweet hour of sunset when

‘Volge il disio
... Ainaviganti ed intenerisce 'l cuore
Lo dì ch'ann detto ai dolci amici addio.’

‘Now was the hour that wakens fond desire
In men at sea, and melts their thoughtful heart
Who in the morn have bid sweet friends farewell.’

CARY, *Trans.*

It was his farewell to earth, for the fatal malaria was already in his veins. The season, the early days of September, was the worst for travelling along the coast, through marshes where the first autumn rains had stirred the deposits of the long, dry summer, drawing forth exhalations of a pestilential character, and Dante reached his home in Ravenna only to die.

We must now return to the narrative of Boccaccio, remembering that this portion of it was

taken down from the lips of an eye-witness of that death, Pietro Giardino, to whom Dante confided,

'as he lay in his last sickness of which he died, that he had already passed his fifty-sixth year by as much time as the interval between the preceding May and that day (September 14).¹

'He then having received, with humility and devotion, every ecclesiastical sacrament, according to the rites of the Christian Faith, and being reconciled to God for all those things which he had done contrary to His will, and at peace with man, in the month of September, in the year of our Lord 1321, on the day when the Invention of the Cross is celebrated by the Church, to the great grief of the aforesaid Guido da Polenta, and generally to that of all the citizens of Ravenna, he commended his weary spirit into the hands of his Creator, the which, I doubt not, was received into the arms of his saintly Beatrice, with whom, in the presence of Him who is the Supreme Good, having bid farewell to the miseries of this world, he lives in that other life, to the everlasting felicity of which there is no end.'

Further, we learn from the same narrative how Guido da Polenta caused the body of Dante to lie in state, vested with all the insignia and decorations becoming a poet; that it was then carried by the chief citizens, accompanied by the whole lamenting populace, with every mark of honour and distinction, to its last resting-place, near the Church of the Franciscans in Ravenna, where it was deposited in the sarcophagus, which

¹ 'Vita di Giovanni Boccaccio,' vol. i.

remains as it was to this day. Guido then returned to the house in which Dante had lived, and there, according to the custom of Ravenna, pronounced a long and eloquent funeral oration, with the double purpose of giving emphasis to the deep learning and distinguished merits of the dead, and to comfort the living friends to whom his loss would occasion such bitter mourning.

A few lines in verse by Antonio Pucci, of which the translation is given, follow, and somewhat amplify the prose narrative of Villani and Boccaccio :

‘There in Ravenna, ne’er again to smile,
But late returned from Venice, whither sent
Ambassador on Guido’s hest erewhile,
He died amid the city’s loud lament.

‘He, the true poet, in that garb they vest ;
The laurel crown they place upon his head ;
A noble book he clasps to silent breast ;
With cloth of gold they drape his fun’ral bed :
Thus willed Polenta’s Lord, at lavish cost,
Some time in life his kind and courteous host.’

CHAPTER VII.

*THE TOMB OF DANTE, AND THE DISCOVERY OF
HIS REMAINS.*

CHAPTER VII.

THE TOMB OF DANTE, AND THE DISCOVERY OF HIS REMAINS.

'In terra è terra mio corpo.'

IN death, as in life, Guido da Polenta held fast by the privilege of honouring his revered guest, and the hospitality which had never ceased to accompany the living form of the poet was now directed to raising such a monument over his remains as would alone have handed him down to posterity had his own merits failed to do so. Moreover, it was to be inscribed with an epitaph, and that this might be worthy of the occasion, Guido threw it open to competition among all the poets of the Romagna, hoping that either because they wished to pay their individual tribute to a great name, or from motives of personal vanity to gain distinction, or because they wished to win the favour and applause of the celebrated Lord of Ravenna, there would be every motive for emulation among them to produce an epitaph which would fitly instruct posterity as to

the high merit of him whose remains were enclosed in that sepulchre. Most unfortunately a scheme so happily conceived, so worthy of Guido da Polenta in its large-hearted liberality and keen desire for perfection, was frustrated by an undeserved and overwhelming disaster.

‘Jolas,’ it will be remembered, was the name assigned by Dante to Guido Novello in the Latin correspondence, because of the friendship between Jolas and *Æneas*; but there was also, though Dante was unaware of it, an element of prophecy in the comparison. The lines of the ‘*Æneid*’ relate of Jolas :

‘In high Lyrnessus and in Troy he held
Two palaces, and was from each expelled ;
Of all the mighty man, the last remains,
A little spot of foreign earth contains.’

Æneid, xii. 800, DRYDEN’S *Trans.*

But before we reach the narrative of subsequent treachery, we will turn to the one bright spot which relieves it, which sets the crown upon the relationship between Guido Novello and his guest, and shows that the sons of Dante knew how to appreciate the constant kindness of their father’s patron and friend. It will be remembered that Guido Novello was called away from Ravenna to Bologna almost immediately after the death of Dante, September 14, 1321, and therefore he had been some seven months at Bologna when he was elected Capitano del Popolo, April 1, 1322.

It was on this day, and to celebrate this event with the greatest compliment in their power, that he received from the sons of Dante the first complete copy of the 'Divina Commedia,' made from his father's autograph by Jacopo Alighieri, with a prefix of his own in 'terza rima,' beginning as follows :

'O voi che siete del verace lume
Alquanto illuminati nella mente
Ch' è sommo frutto dell' alto volume
Perche vostra natura sia possente
Più nel veder l' esser dell' Universo
Guardate all' alta Commedia.'

'All ye within whose minds some streak doth shine,
If but with tempered ray of light divine,
Of this consummate work the end and aim,
If that your nature would with power claim
The being of the universe to see,
Then look within this lofty comedy.'

Then follows the preface, 'Proemio di Jacopo Alighieri al suo commento sopra la Commedia di Dante suo Padre.' It begins :

'Acciò che del fructo universale novellamente dato al mondo pr lo illustro phylosopo poeta Dante Alighieri co' più agevolezza si possa gustare p. coloro in cui lume naturale alquanto risplende senza scientifica appresione io Jacopo suo figluolo p. materiale prosa dimostrare itendo parlare del miso profondo ed autentico itendimento. La quale per più chiarezza simigliantamente

si conviene seguitare dichiarando ore bisogna quella parte al libro p. dicto p. titolo che a cio si conviene nella quale cominciando cosi procedo Nel mezzo del cammin,' etc.,

which may be translated :

'In order that the fruit newly given to the world by the illustrious philosopher and poet, Dante Alighieri, may be of universal benefit, and more easily tasted by those whose natural intellect is not seconded by scientific knowledge, I, Jacopo, his son, intend to demonstrate in plain language some part of his profound and true meaning. The which for more clearness it will be better to follow closely, explaining where it is necessary that part of the aforesaid book citing the passage in question, and beginning with it, I proceed *Nel mezzo del cammin,' etc.*

This work is sent first to Guido da Polenta, because no one is so fit to correct it as Guido, on account of his intimate acquaintance with the poem itself, quaintly described by Jacopo as 'his sister,' whose features are so familiar to Guido.

The sonnet is as follows :

'Acciò che le bellezze Signor mio
 Che mia sorella nel suo lume porta
 Habian d' agevolezza alcuna scorta
 Più in coloro in cui porgen disio
 La qual di tal piacer ciascun conforta
 Ma non a quelli c' han la luce morta
 Che 'l ricordar a lor saria oblio !
 Però a voi c' havete sue fattezze
 Per natural prudenza habituate
 Prima la mando che la corregiate.

E s' ella è digna che la commendiate
Ch' altri non è che di cotai bellezze
Habia sì come voi vere chiarezze.'

'In order that, O lord and master mine,
My sister's beauties, as they radiant shine,
May with the more facility unfold
To those who seek them with desire to hold,
The which on such will ever comfort shed,
But not on those in whom true light is dead
(To such remembrance gives oblivion place) :
Therefore to thee I send—the well-known face,
Familiar, long by gift and learning proved,
I send, that worthy she may be approved ;
For none as thee with such discerning eye
Beauties so great hast power to descry.'

Carducci, one of the greatest modern authorities on Italian literature, comments thus upon this sonnet :

'There is certainly no affinity between the verses of Dante and those of Jacopo, yet to have for a father the father of the "Divina Commedia" is a matter for family pride to which nothing can be compared in this world. To have felt this pride, to have loved the work of his father, which, on account of its superlative character, must deprive anyone bearing the same name of any hope of distinction ; to have loved it so well as to have clothed this awful and terrible vision with a semblance of corporeal form, and to have called it by one of the sweetest names of family relationship, showing by that affectionate metaphor the place it held in his thoughts, testifies to the noble and generous nature of the man ; for the power

to reverence genius for its own sake, and the faculty to understand it, stands only second to genius itself.¹

This preface, often to be found in MS. copies of the 'Divina Commedia,' rests for authenticity upon three of the most important, because the earliest, MSS. of the poem—I. The Bodleian MS., from which the translation on the previous page has been made. II. That of the Carriani of Mantua, which bears the signature of the scribe, Jacopus de Placentia, 1380, and, after giving the introduction by Jacopo Alighieri, cites also the sonnet, which, 'with the aforesaid introduction, was sent, by Jacopo, the son of Dante, to the magnificent and noble knight, Guido da Polenta, A.D. 1322.'² III. That of the Codice Dantesco, in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, date 1351,³ which, besides bearing the name of Jacopo, has also this conclusion :

'Per ipsum missus fuit ad magnificentum et sapientum militem Dūm Guidonem de Polentia anno millesimo trecentesimo vigesimo secundo dii primo mensis Aprilis,'

and is followed by the valuable glosses of our Jacopo upon the 'Inferno.'⁴

This proemio, or preface, by Jacopo Alighieri, which relates to the whole poem, must not be confused with another gloss upon his father's

¹ Carducci, 'Della varia Fortuna di Dante.'

² 'Ultimo Rifugio,' p. 175.

³ No. 7,765 old numerale, now 534.

⁴ 'Seguitato da Pregōn chiose del n' Jacopo supra l' Inferno.'

work, entitled the 'Divisione di Jacopo Alighieri,' of which the MS. is also to be found in the Paris Library.¹ The 'Divisione' has reference only to the 'Paradiso,' dividing it—hence the name of 'Divisione'—into nine parts, explaining that this form has been chosen because of the 'good' of which the number nine is the emblem, 'Simile al ben che dal nove declina.' Thus, Jacopo divides off, in short doggerel couplets, the well-known nine spheres of the 'Paradiso,' concluding with the lines of which the translation is subjoined :

'Therefore from this you may henceforward see
How much of that profound high fantasy
Of Dante, sole artificer and sire,
You may by careful study there acquire.
See how the words upon his ample page
The universal good successful gauge ;
Hence, by example, how to evil shun,
Nor with unmastered passion heedless run,
And fatal plant our feet in error's way
(Which from th' eternal temple leads astray) ;
For he himself was once a wanderer lost,
Till a hand stretched from out th' heavenly host
Led him by will Divine forth from the strife,
While yet midway in this our earthly life.'

How quickly the knowledge of the poem became diffused over the Court of Guido Novello at Bologna may easily be imagined, and it was in Bologna that the first commentaries upon it by Graziolo dei Bambaglioli (1324) and Jacopo della

¹ MS. da Francesco di Maestro Tura, etc.

Lana (1323-1328) began to appear. Both had political and official relations with Guido Novello, which we may fairly conclude may have been drawn to a common literary centre by their joint and close study of the 'Divina Commedia.' In all probability this would be also the period when Giovanni del Virgilio, in response to the appeal from Guido Novello, wrote the famous epitaph :

'Theologus Dantes nullius dogmatis expers,
 Quod foveat claro philosophia sinu :
 Gloria Musarum, vulgo gratissimus auctor,
 Hic jacet, et fama pulsat utrumque polum.
 Qui loca defunctis gelidis regnumque gemellum
 Distribuit, logicis, rhetoricasque modis.
 Pascua Pieriis demum resonabat avenis ;
 Atropos heu ! lectum livida rupit opus.
 Huic ingrata tulit tristem Florentia fructum,
 Exilium vati patria cruda suo.
 Quem pia Guidonis gremio Ravenna Novelli
 Gaudet honorati continuisse Ducas
 Mille trecentenis ter septem Numinis annis
 Ad sua septembbris idibus astra reddit.'

'Dante the theologian, wanting in no dogma
 Of all that Philosophy cherishes in her glorious bosom,
 The glory of the Muses, the most famous author in
 the vernacular,
 Lies here, but with his name strikes the two Poles,
 Who told in due order, by rule of Logic and Rhetoric,
 Of the places for the cold dead and of that other em-
 pire.

Lastly, he began to celebrate the Shepherd's Arcady
with Pierian pipe.

Alas ! envious Fate cut short the work in its bloom.
To him ungrateful Florence, his unkind country,
Rendered to her poet a bitter recompense of exile ;
Him pious Ravenna delights to have held
In the bosom of her honoured Lord Guido Novello.
In the year of God 1321, on the Ides of September,
He returned to his own stars.¹

The touch of internal evidence as to the 'Shepherd's Arcady,' from the pen of Dante's correspondent, in the eclogues from which we have cited, seems to add another convincing proof to the weight of evidence in favour of Giovanni del Virgilio as the author.

Following the narrative another step, we can picture to ourselves that this would have been the epitaph engraved by Guido Novello upon the 'egregia sepoltura' with which he intended to honour the resting-place of Dante on his return to Ravenna, after the expiration of his temporary office of Capitano del Popolo.² This was frustrated by the treacherous plot which announced itself by the brutal murder of Rainaldo da Polenta, Archbishop of Ravenna, and brother of Guido Novello. Documents still extant attest the immediate departure of Guido for Ravenna, to avenge his brother's death, and the prompt succour tendered by the Bolognese, but in vain; he never re-entered

¹ Translation made by J. S. Phillimore, Esq., Ch. Ch., Oxford.

² *Vide ante*, p. 171.

the city, and thus the first project for the adornment of the sepulchre, either by the hand of the sculptor or the verse of the poet, came to nothing. That the lines of Giovanni del Virgilio, however, were preserved we owe to Boccaccio, who tells us that he himself examined the poems of the competing poets of the Romagna,

‘and that as, on account of the great misfortune which foiled the purpose of Guido Novello, they could not appear on the tomb; nor indeed, had it been otherwise, could all the compositions have been inscribed there, but only one most worthy of the honour—these verses, I say, having been shown to me, and having examined them all, I consider that, both as to style and sentiment, the fourteen lines by that great and famous poet, Giovanni del Virgilio, the intimate friend, moreover, of Dante, are the most worthy of preservation, and therefore I transcribe them here.’¹

We have seen that Guido Novello was the fortunate recipient of the earliest complete copy of the ‘Divina Commedia’; but, it may be asked, why did an interval of nine months elapse between the death of Dante and the presentation of this copy to his patron? This is accounted for by a very interesting contemporary anecdote related by Boccaccio in his narrative, and corroborated by Piero di Giardino, whose intimate relations with Dante will be borne in mind by the reader.

‘It was,’ Boccaccio tells us, ‘a habit with Dante, as soon as he had finished six or eight cantos, before anyone

¹ ‘Vita di Dante.’

else had seen them, to send them to Can Grande della Scala, whom he esteemed more than any other living man, and as soon as he had seen them, Dante would then make a copy for anyone else who wished for it. In this way, having sent him all but the last thirteen cantos—these being done, but not as yet sent—it happened that Dante, not having any recollection that they had not been sent, died ; and the survivors, both sons and disciples, having sought many times and for many months among all his writings for the completion of the work, and not being able, in spite of all their efforts, to discover the lost cantos, renewing again and again the search, urged by the entreaties of every surviving friend of the poet, coupled with bitter lamentations that God had not lent him a little longer to the world, so as to enable him to complete his work, they were driven to distraction. Jacopo and Piero, the sons of Dante—both of them more or less adepts in the art of verse—urged by the persevering entreaties of the friends, were about to attempt to supply the missing cantos, so that their father's work might not go forth incomplete into the world, when to Jacopo, who was of the two most eagerly bent upon this course, a vision appeared, which not only put an end to such presumptuous folly, but also revealed to them where the thirteen missing cantos were to be found, which hitherto they had sought for in vain.

‘A worthy citizen of Ravenna, Pier Giardino by name, and for a long time himself the pupil of Dante, was wont to relate how, in the eighth month after the death of his master, this same Jacopo arrived at his house in the night, just near to the hour of dawn, and told him that he had that very night, a very short time previously,

seen a vision in his sleep of Dante, his father, clad in white robes and with an unwonted light upon his face, advance towards him ; that it seemed as if he, Jacopo, then addressed him and asked him if he still lived ; to which he replied, Yes, but that he was alive with a true life—not with this of ours. Then it seemed as if he (Jacopo) further asked him (Dante) whether before passing into the true life he had completed his work, and, if he had completed it, where was the missing portion, which they had sought in vain, to be found. To this question he appeared to hear for the second time the answer, Yes, I finished it. And then it seemed as if the spirit took him by the hand and led him into the chamber where he was wont to sleep when in life, and, touching one part of it, he said, “It is here, that which you have so long sought for.” And having said this, it seemed as if both the vision and his own sleep vanished simultaneously, on which account he (Jacopo) would declare that he was quite unable to keep from coming to him (Pier Giardino) at once to relate what had occurred, in order that they might both go together and search in the spot indicated, of which he retained an accurate recollection, in order to see if it had been pointed out by a true spirit or was merely a false delusion of the mind. Therefore, although it was still night, they set off together, arrived at the spot indicated, and there they found a stove fixed against the wall, the which yielded easily to their efforts to move it, revealing behind it a little window, which had hitherto entirely escaped their observation—nor did they even know that it was there—and in that window-seat they found some manuscript sheets, mildewed and about to perish from the damp of the walls. These, when cleansed from mildew, they per-

ceived, on reading them, to be the thirteen lost cantos. At this discovery they proceeded at once to copy them and send them, according to the author's custom, to Can (Grande della Scala), and then united them to the imperfect work in their due place. Thus the poem which it had taken so many years to construct was completed at last.¹

The simple narrative of Boccaccio has been given word for word as he received it from Pier di Giardino.

That Pier di Giardino existed, that he was the friend and pupil of Dante, present at his last illness if not actual death, that he was alive when Boccaccio came to Ravenna in 1346, are all matters of proved history, and these facts being now patent to all, no purpose is gained by citing those authorities who since, arguing from one common basis, have either rejected with scorn, or believed, or partly rejected and partly believed the extraordinary vision.

But it must be pointed out that the negative criticism which has eagerly assailed the credibility of the narrator, the better to discredit his statement, is not supported by the more recent investigation of Boccaccio's literary work.

The *Giornale Dantesco* for the current year, which contains two very interesting articles entitled 'Il culto del Boccaccio per Dante,' points out how the whole of Boccaccio's work bears the impress of his intense devotion to Dante, and that more and more as his study deepened of the great

¹ Boccaccio, 'Vita di Dante,' pp. 63, 64.

Master, the result appears in his own work, till the 'Vita di Dante,' which was the last of Boccaccio's writings, became

'a priceless jewel in Italian literature, redounding no less to the glory of the biographer than the subject of the biography. Besides the Italian editions of the "Vita di Dante," we possess Latin translations and paraphrases re-translated into Italian, which prove how, on its diffusion, it became the common patrimony, so to speak, of reader and copyist alike, the field upon which their labours were concentrated.'

'What, then, is the amount of reliance to be placed upon the great novelist ?

'Shall we say with Aretino, Manetti, Filelfo, and Gaddi, that he is careless and untrustworthy ? Shall we share the sceptical opinion of his work held by Vellutello, Biscioni, Maffei, Tiraboschi and Todeschini ? Or shall we go a little further, with Mercurio, and declare that he is not the author of the work at all ? All these exaggerated statements have been brought into the crucible of modern criticism, and all now know that "Il Certaldese" (Boccaccio) made investigation, and drew his information from the best and purest sources—from Piero Giardino, for a long time the disciple of Dante ; Andrea di Leon Poggi, the nephew by the mother's side of Alighieri ; and Ser Dino Perini, another of his greatest friends ; and all know that, if any of these witnesses gave contradictory evidence, the biographer vindicated his claim to a trustworthy narrative by honestly stating the several versions, leaving the reader to the free exercise of his own judgment.'¹

¹ *Giornale Dantesco*, Anno v., ii. della Nuova Serie, Quaderno vii., p. 304.

No less striking than the vindication of his truth as a narrator has been the vindication of his truth as a prophet as to the fate of the remains of his Master. Following immediately upon his recital of the death and burial of Dante, we find in his narrative the short chapter of bitter reproof to the Florentines,¹ which concludes with this striking passage of prophecy :

‘ Thy Dante Alighieri has died in the unjust exile to which thy envy of his just merit consigned him. Ah ! the shame of having to record that a mother was envious of her own child. Now thou art freed from all further alarm on that account ; now by his death thou canst live in unchecked security amid thy imperfections, and bring thy prolonged unjust persecutions to an end. He cannot do to thee, dead, what living he would never have done. He sleeps beneath another sky than thine, nor mayest thou ever hope to see him again, till that day when thou wilt again see all thy citizens, to whom a just Judge will give the final award. If then, as it has been said, all anger, hatred and strife cease with the death of whoever it is that dies, begin now to reflect within thyself, and in a calmer frame of mind begin to think with shame of having acted contrary to thy wonted kindness ; begin now to show thyself as mother rather than enemy, and of thy mother’s pity give to thy son the tears which are his due ; and he whom thou didst reject, and when in life didst drive away from thee, seek at least to regain in death ; re-invest him with thy citizenship in thy bosom, and let thy honours adorn his memory. . . . Seek, then, to have the guardianship of thy Dante, asking to have

¹ ‘ Rimprovero ai Fiorentini.’

him back ; show that compassion at least, supposing it not to be thy wish, and so with this fiction seek to remove some of the blame of thy former conduct. I tell thee, I am certain of it, that he will not be given back to thee, and in that hour when, by asking for him, thou wilt seek to show thy compassion, thou wilt, on being refused, reap the reward of thy former innate cruelty. But what am I advising thee to do ? Hardly can I believe that, if dead bodies are capable of feeling, that of Dante would wish to leave the place where it now lies to return to thee. It lies in far more honourable company than any thou couldst supply. He lies in Ravenna, far more worthy of veneration than thou art, and if now showing somewhat of the decay of age, in her youth she flourished far more than thou ever wilt. She holds as in one vast sepulchre the bodies of great and holy men, so that there is no part of the city where you can tread without feeling that their ashes lie beneath you. Why, then, should the body of Dante desire to return to thee, to lie among thy dead, who, it would seem, preserve in death the anger and rabid factions of life, and in their enmity flee the one from the other, like the flames of the two Thebans ? Whereas Ravenna, almost completely bathed in the blood of the martyrs, where to this day their relics are reverently preserved, and in like manner the bodies of many a magnificent emperor, and other great and noble men, distinguished both on account of their ancestry and good work, will rejoice not a little that, besides all her other precious dowry, it was also the gift of God to her to be the perpetual guardian of such a treasure as is the body of him whose works have held the admiration of the whole world, of whom thou wert not worthy ; and yet not so great will be

her joy at possessing him, but that her envy of thee from whom he had his origin will be greater still, grieving that she can only claim the record of his last day beside thee, to whom belongs the first. And so remain with thy ingratitude, while to Ravenna, rejoicing in her honours, will belong the triumph of posterity.'

Read by the light of subsequent history, the prophecy is not a little extraordinary, so much so that, although the facts are already known to most students of Dante, no excuse will be required for restating them here. So great were the vicissitudes which beset the remains of Dante, that it would seem that as if in death no more than in life was there to be a permanent place of rest for '*lo corpo dentro al qual io feci ombra.*'

In life we know that a clause in one of the sentences of exile forbade the return of Dante to Florence under pain of being burnt at the stake. His body had not been in the grave eight years, when it was threatened with the same fate. The proposed desecration arose out of an unwarrantable use of his book '*De Monarchia.*' The arguments on which the treatise is based were twisted by Ludovic of Bavaria to back the pretensions of Piero della Corvara, the Antipope, whom he created because John XXII., the reigning Pope, had refused him the Imperial crown.

The book, hitherto almost unknown, became famous by this unseemly controversy, and therefore on the defeat of Ludovic, the dispersal of the Antipapal party, and the fall of the Antipope, the

Papal Legate, Bertrando del Poggetto, was instructed to burn the book as an heretical composition. The bones of the author were condemned to the same fate, and were only rescued from it by the timely intervention of Pino della Tosa, a gentleman of Bologna, and Ostazio da Polenta, then in power at Ravenna. But a Riminese monk, Guido Vernano, of the Order of San Domenico, was instructed to prepare a refutation of the obnoxious work, the MS. of which, 'De Reprobatione Monarchiæ compositæ,' is still extant in the archives of Ravenna. The MS. of the 'Morale' of Pietro di Dante, which takes the form of 'Il Lamento delle Sette Arti' over the condemnation of Dante as a heretic, has also been preserved to us. The contemplated desecration of his remains would, it is observed with bitter sarcasm, have surprised nobody, for

'what could signify the committal of a book and just a handful of dry bones to the flames in those times, when, in the name of the most edifying Christianity, men were burnt, and not unfrequently in the full tide of life, sound in body and mind?'¹

For more than sixty years after this first attempt to violate the sepulchre the remains were allowed to rest in peace. During this period one, if not two, epitaphs were engraved upon the sarcophagus. It has been said by some of the writers upon this vexed question, that these epi-

¹ 'Ult. Rif.,' 193.

taphs displaced the lines by Giovanni del Virgilio. But contemporary evidence does not seem to support this theory.

Boccaccio, as we have seen, preserved the lines in his Life of Dante, because they were *not* engraved upon the tomb, and from Menghino Mezzani's sonnet to Bernardo da Canistro we certainly infer that no inscription had hitherto adorned the sarcophagus. It will be remembered that he wrote thus from his captivity to Bernardo:¹

‘Thine, then, at last the pious tribute laid,
Messer Bernardo, at our Dante’s feet,
Dearer to him because none else have made
Of all his other friends an offering meet.

* * * * *

Through thy device that name can never die,
Unless, indeed, first die this iron age.
Behold thy marble there, where every eye
Can read the lines from off the solid page.
Honour thus paid unto the senseless clay
Of thy great love in life shall fitly say.’

This sonnet, Bernardo's reply to Menghino Mezzani, and the epitaph itself,² are all to be found attached to a fourteenth-century MS. of the 'Divina Commedia' in the Bodleian Library.³

¹ *Vide ante.*

² MS. of epitaph by Bernardo Canacci attached to page 193 of a fourteenth-century parchment copy of the 'Divina Commedia.' Bernardo Canaccio is described as Bernardo 'Da Canistro.' 'Epitaffium ad Sepulcrum Dantis in Ravenna Urbe factum per dominum Bernardum de Canistro.'—'Jura Monarchiæ,' etc.

³ Bodleian Library, Canon. Ital., 97, 193.

The epitaph, with the prefix

‘Epitaffium ad Sepulcrum Dantis in Ravenna
Urbe factum per Dominum Bernardum de Canatros,’

is as follows :

‘Jura Monarchiæ, Superos, Phlegetonta, lacusque
Lustrando cecini voluerunt fata quousque
Sed quia pars cessit melioribus hospita castris
Actoremque suum petit felicior astris,
Hic claudor Dantes, patriis extorris ab oris
Quem genuit parvi Florentia mater amoris.’

‘The Rights of Monarchy, celestial realms,
Phlegethon, th’ infernal lake, while traversing, I sung
Long as the fates so willed. Because of me
One part has ceased from here, and upwards soared
Happy towards its Author ’mid the stars,
To dwell in better tents, made welcome there.
Here lie I, Dante, banished from thy land,
Florence who bare me, mother scant of love.’

This inscription remains upon the tomb to this day, but the second epitaph, which belongs to the same period, always cited together with the ‘Jura Monarchiæ’ of Bernardo da Canatros, has disappeared from the sarcophagus. That it was once there, and that it was inscribed at about the same time above the one still extant, it seems hardly possible to doubt, after the discovery of the Cesena copy of the ‘Divina Commedia,’ by Francesco di Maestro Tura. Transcribed in 1378, it recites that this second epitaph had been ‘recently

engraved'; that it occupied a place above the 'Jura Monarchiæ,' and that it was the work of that discreet and learned man Menghino Mezzani of Ravenna.¹

This epitaph is as follows :

'Inclita fama cuius universum penetrat orbem
Dantes Aligherius florentina natus in urbe,
Conditor eloquio lumenque decusque latini
Vulnere sævæ necis stratus ad sidera tendens
Dominicis annis ter septem mille tercentis
Septembbris idibus includitur aula superna.'

'He whose glorious fame reaches through the whole world,
Dante Alighieri, born in the city of Florence,
The founder of the vernacular, the bright star and honour of Latinity,
Laid low by the stroke of cruel death, bound for the stars,
In the year of our Lord 1321, on the Ides of September 13th,
And is numbered in the Court of Heaven.'

Whether it was indeed written by Menghino Mezzani after his release from captivity in 1350, which probability is suggested by the statement in the MS. of 1378 that it had been 'recently engraved' on the tomb, or whether it was, as some say, the work of Jacopo Alighieri, it bears, like the companion epitaph by Bernardo da

¹ Codice della Divina Commedia, del Secolo xiv. Citato dal De Batines, ii. 135, 237.

Canistro, the stamp of the age, and this should make us lenient to the jumble of false quantities which Dr. Moore hopes never did 'disfigure the poet's tomb.'¹

We may, then, sum up the facts connected with this first epoch of the sepulchre as follows: At the death of Dante, September 13, 1321, Guido Novello caused the remains to be provisionally interred in a stone sarcophagus, evidently one of the many ancient sarcophagi which to this day remain a characteristic feature in Ravenna.

Guido, driven into exile, was foiled in his purpose of erecting the noble sepulchre which he had planned, and the sarcophagus appears to have remained without ornament till past the middle of the fourteenth century; only the name of the poet inscribed upon it gave evidence of its precious contents. Shortly after Boccaccio's second or third visit to Ravenna, in 1353, the sarcophagus appears to have been repolished, and either simultaneously, or within a very short period of each other, there appeared upon it the two epitaphs cited above.

It was at the close of the year, December 22, 1396, that Florence made the first of those demands for the remains of Dante which Boccaccio in his prophecy had anticipated. This first claim arose out of the decree that five monuments were to be erected in Santa Maria del Fiore to the most famous literary men of Florence. The name

¹ *Historical Review*, October, 1888.

of Dante stood second to that of Accursio, and preceded that of Petrarch; the names Zanobi da Strada and Boccaccio completed the list.

It was probably in order that the bones of Dante might rest beneath the proposed monument that Ravenna was solicited to restore them to Florence. The demand being refused, the request was reiterated on February 1, 1429, on the same plea, and it was again refused. But the desire of the Florentines was stimulated and kept alive by a certain Frate Antonio Neri, a preacher of some fame, an appointed reader and lecturer upon the 'Divina Commedia' in Florence in 1430-1432. He caused to be painted and placed in the cathedral a portrait of Dante, which has since been displaced for that by Michelino in 1430. But the old painting was inscribed with curious and obscure lines, the sense of which has been interpreted, with a note by Bartolomeo Ceffoni, to this effect :

'These verses are a copy of those painted and written into the old painting, which represents Dante in Santa Liperata, otherwise Santa Maria del Fiore, where at this present time (1430) Dante is being read by Antonio Frate di San Francesco. This same Master Antonio caused the said painting to be executed, to remind the Florentines that they must bring back the bones of Dante to Florence in order to do him the honour which he deserves in a fitting place.'¹

Stung by refusal, the Florentines began to cast

¹ Codice Riccard, 1036, A.C. 180, quoted in the 'Ultimo Rifugio,' p. 381.

about for some powerful ally to support their demand, so their next attempt was made in the time of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, April 17, 1476, through the Venetian Ambassador, urging Venice to coerce Ravenna, then under her dominion, into yielding up the coveted remains. It is supposed, though not absolutely proved, that this Ambassador was no other than Bernardo Bembo, and that when he failed to influence his Government in favour of the Florentine demand for the restoration of the remains, he directed his energies to adorning the place of their repose. His epitaph is a record of the neglected condition in which he found the sepulchre :

‘Exigua tumuli Dantes hic sorte jacebas
 Squallenti nulli cognite pene situ.
 At nunc marmoreo subnixus conderis arcu
 Omnibus et cultu splendidiore nites.
 Nimirum Bembus musis incensus ethruscis
 Hoc tibi quem in primus hoc coluere dedit.
 Ann. Sal. MCCCCCLXXXIII. vi. Kal. Jvn.
 Bernardus Bemb. Praet. ære suo Posuit.’

‘Here, Dante, in the penurious chance of thy burial
 Thou didst lie, scarce known to any man for the foul
 neglect,
 But now under a marble vault thou’rt laid to rest,
 And shin’st with a brighter splendour than all.
 For Bembo, fired by the Tuscan Muses,
 Rendered this tribute to thee, their prime favourite.
 The year of salvation 1483, the sixth day before the
 first of June, Bernardo Bembo, Chief Magistrate,
 erected this at his own cost.’

He placed the work in the hands of the sculptor Pietro Lombardi, who was at that time employed by the Republic to execute various works in Ravenna, as, for example, the two columns in the Piazza Maggiore, the one surmounted by the symbolical Lion, the other by a statue of San Apollinare,¹ and the image of St. Mark, now in the cathedral.

These are only interesting as being the work of the sculptor who adorned the tomb of Dante, and whose work, almost as it originally stood, can be seen to this day. The ingress to the tomb was not altered by Pietro Lombardi, but was still as it had hitherto been, from the Piazzetta. Immediately opposite, with its back to the wall, was the ancient 'Arca Lapidea,' which was repolished and somewhat reduced in dimensions by the clever sculptor. He placed above it a sculptured effigy in Istrian marble of Dante, with the poet's laurel round his head, and the 'vair' tippet of a Doctor of Divinity upon his shoulders, in the act of reading from an open book, which rests on a desk in front of him. The face being in profile, the traditional cast of feature is accentuated by the sculptor, and it must be freely owned that both in attitude and expression it is a somewhat stiff and cramped representation of the poet. The chin is supported by the left hand, the right rests upon another book laid open upon a table, where three volumes and an

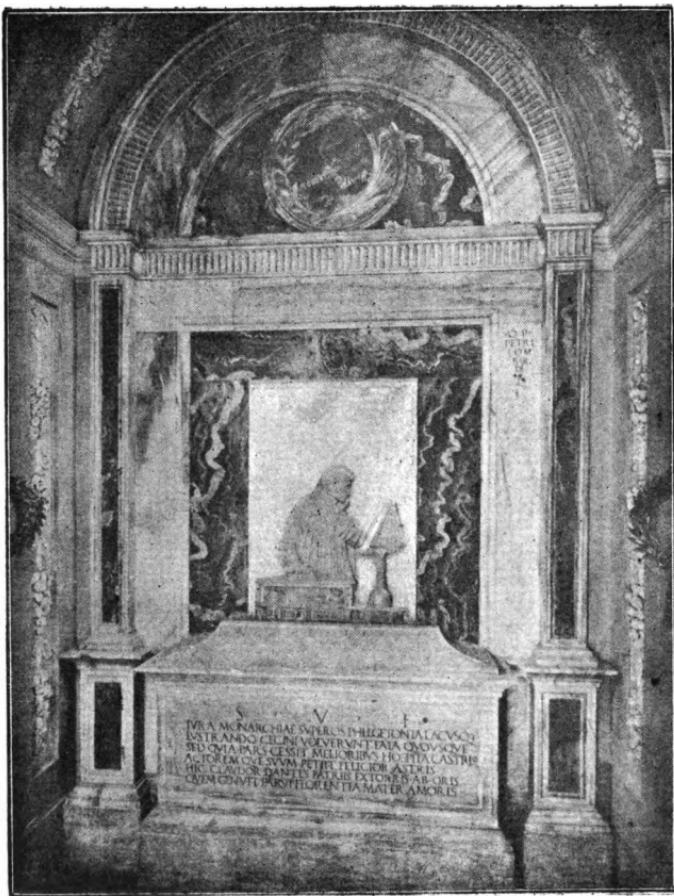
¹ Since displaced by that of San Vitale by Clemente Molli.

inkstand are also represented. Although more of an effigy than a sculpture, the whole effect has a certain merit and a character of its own. Pietro Lombardi, it has been well remarked by Cicognara, approached his task more from the architect's than from the sculptor's point of view, and the architecture and decorations have a certain chaste elegance characteristic of the period. The basso-relievo, or effigy, is let into a background of African veined marble, which must have belonged at one time to some ancient monument at Ravenna. This in its turn has an ornamentation of Grecian marble which forms the setting and frame. The two materials are blended in the same way in the architectural ornamentation of the lunette above, which takes the form of a funeral wreath, half laurel, half palm, emblematic of the glory of the poet and the suffering of the exile, and surrounds the motto 'Virtuti et Honori.' The same motto and the same emblems are repeated on a smaller scale in a little square of marble which was once an outside decoration, but is now inserted in the wall on the left-hand side. This ornament carries a shield in the centre, inscribed with the words

'His non cedo Malis,'

freely interpreted :

'Because of the poet's crown,
Because of the martyr's palm,
I do not yield to misfortune.'



INTERIOR OF THE TOMB OF DANTE.

To face p. 194.

The sarcophagus itself, which originally was on the same gigantic scale as those which are still to be seen in S. Apollinare in Classe, was somewhat reduced in its dimensions by Lombardi, but the proof that it is the original one in which the body was laid was clearly established when it was opened in 1865. It was then seen that the lower slab which formed the bottom had received a faint but distinct impression of the skeleton. Had the sarcophagus been sculptured anew out of the living marble in 1483, and the remains then transferred to it, it is evident that these, dry with the dust of a century and a half, could have left no impression upon the stone. The lid of the sarcophagus is sculptured, like many of the ancient sarcophagi, in imitation of the scales of a fish. It is raised on a pedestal, and enclosed in a marble frame with ornamentation like that of the upper part of the tomb. Upon the face of it the sculptured imitation of a white cloth drawn and fastened with nails carries the epitaph by Bernardo da Canistro as it appears to this day. It was replaced where it had originally been by Bembo, with the prefix of the three capitals S. V. F. These mysterious letters have been the subject of much comment, and have been variously interpreted; but it is supposed that Bernardo Bembo followed a tradition much in vogue at the time that Dante wrote his own epitaph, and that, therefore, S. V. F. stand for 'Sibi Vivens Fecit': 'Made by himself when

alive.' That it was a mistaken tradition arising out of the use of the first person by Bernardo da Canistro seems to be proved by the poetical interchange of sonnets between Bernardo da Canistro and Menghino Mezzani, but that such a tradition existed may possibly account for Bembo having caused that epitaph only to be re-engraved upon the tomb, discarding the other one, 'Inclita Fama,' which had, we believe, up to that time been inscribed above it.

Such were the first adornments of the sepulchre as they were completed by Bernardo Bembo at the close of the fourteenth century. The succeeding century was yet in its youth when Florence returned to the charge and made the most famous and the most formidable of all her attempts, this time being determined to possess herself by force of the treasure which Ravenna had denied to her reiterated entreaties. The Accademia Medicea at Florence drew up the petition and addressed it, not to Ravenna, but to Leo X., the Medici and Florentine Pope, the patron of the *belles-lettres* and the arts. Moreover, he was Lord of Ravenna, for that city had by the League of Cambrai (1509) passed under the Papal dominions. The petition of the Medicæan Academy, bearing date October 20, 1519, had many signatures. Among these were the names of Jacopo Nardi, Luigi Alamanni, Giro-lamo Benivieni and Pietro Portinari, a descendant of the family of Beatrice. Finally, it was backed by Michael Angelo, who wrote across it :

'I, Michael Angelo, sculptor, supplicate your Holiness in the same terms, offering myself to make a worthy sepulchre for the divine poet in an honoured place in this same city.' Leave was granted, as we gather from a letter of Cardinal Pietro Bembo—son of the very Bernardo Bembo who had just completed the tomb—to the Florentines to carry away the bones of Dante from Ravenna to Florence, and every facility was given them to execute their purpose. The Magistrate and Council of Ravenna having refused to pay an exorbitant demand of 150 florins of gold to support the Papal Swiss Guard, Leo X. caused them to be imprisoned in Cesena. At that moment, while the city was deprived of its natural protectors, the Envoys of Florence and the President of the Romagna arrived in the dead of the night to make good their claim. Fortified with the Papal authority, they betook themselves to the tomb of Dante. They raised the stone lid of the sarcophagus, intending to withdraw the remains and transport them at last to Florence.

But their tyranny and their efforts were alike in vain. The tomb was empty save for a fragment of bone and a few withered leaves of the laurel which had adorned the poet's head. Ravenna had fought gallantly in the open field so long as it was possible, but perceiving that on this occasion she must be defeated by overwhelming odds, she had had recourse to strategy.

For nearly three and a half centuries no one

knew what that strategy was. The first attempt to account for the loss of the remains is characteristic of the times :

‘And thus,’ recites the memorial drawn up by Carlo Nardi to Pope Leo, ‘there could be no translation made of the bones of Dante, because the deputies from the Accademia (Medicea) having visited his tomb, they found Dante neither in soul nor yet in body ; and it being believed that he had in his lifetime, in body as well as in spirit, made the journey through the Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso, so in death it must now be assumed that in body as well as in spirit in either one or other of those realms he has been received and welcomed.’

Whether or not this explanation was considered satisfactory we do not know, but the very sudden death of Leo X. early in the following year may account for no steps having been taken to press the matter further at the time. But to Clement VII., successor to Leo X., a sonnet was speedily addressed by Alvisi reciting the failure of the attempt of his brother Leone, ‘Sommo Pastore,’ urging him to punish the Ravennese who had stolen away the bones, and, with a pun on his name, to show ‘clemency’ to Dante by restoring his remains to an honoured place in Florence.

Clement VII., of a different disposition to Leo X., was too engrossed with political difficulties to have either time or inclination to follow up the quest, and Florence, daunted by the hope-

lessness of the empty tomb, seems to have given up the task in despair.

In Ravenna the tradition of the loss was studiously shrouded in mystery, if not altogether concealed. But there was always a floating sense of uneasiness amongst the populace upon the subject.

About the middle of the seventeenth century, the Franciscans made considerable alterations in the chapel of Braccioforte, adjoining the tomb of Dante. This chapel, dedicated first to the Nativity of the Saviour, subsequently to San Pier Crisologo, owes its present name to a tradition connected with a very ancient wooden Crucifix which it contained, and which was held by the people in great veneration. Andrea Agnello, the historian of the ninth century, records that on one occasion two friends came to the chapel, and solemnly called upon the Crucifix to be witness to a secret loan between them. The lender, exhibiting the money he was about to lend to his friend, made his invocation thus :

‘ O Lord God Omnipotent, do Thou be my surety for this act.’

The friend, having received the money, went away to the East without any thought of returning to Ravenna. The lender, at last weary of waiting, betook himself again to the chapel, and, standing in front of the Crucifix, called upon the effigy of the Saviour to make good the surety-

ship, and, by the might of the strong arm (braccio forte) of God, to maintain his cause.

The historian goes on to relate how the strong arm of God brought back the debtor from the Far East, and made him pay all that was due, so that the two friends went their ways in peace, and the chapel has ever since borne the name of Braccio Forte—the Strong Arm of God.

This ancient chapel was originally connected with the tomb of Dante by a portico with marble columns. This portico appears to have been altogether removed by the Franciscans in 1658, when they were making considerable alterations in their church and convent. The doorway of the chapel, which corresponded with the entrance to the tomb of Dante, was blocked up, and another access was given from the chapel into the church. The sepulchre was reconstructed, with the entrance to the north, facing the Piazza Maggiore, as we see it to this day.

But the Franciscans, absorbed in the larger repairs of their church and convent, contented themselves with reconstructing the exterior of the tomb, leaving the interior in such a state of neglect that Cardinal Corsi, the Papal Legate, following the example of Bernardo Bembo, determined to rescue it once more from such a condition. He had not, however, taken into account the indignant opposition of the Franciscan Brotherhood. They claimed jurisdiction over the sepulchre, and so harassed the stone-masons engaged upon the

work of restoration that the Cardinal was obliged to apply for a guard of forty sbirri to protect the workmen, who laboured without intermission day and night till the restoration was completed, May 4, 1692. Then the Cardinal wrote in turn his epitaph, and caused it to be placed upon the tomb. It runs as follows :

‘ Exvlem a Florentia Dantem Liberalissime
Excepit Ravenna.
Vivo fruens Mortuum colens
Magnis cineribus licet in parvo magnifici parentarvnt
Polentani Principes erigendo
Bembvs Prætor Lvcylentissime extvndo
Prætiosum Mysis et Apollini Mavsoleum
Quod injuria temporvm pene sqvallens
E. mō Dominico Maria Cvrso Legato
Joanne Salviato Prolegato
Magni civis cineres Patriæ reconciliare
Cvltus perpetvitate cvrantibvs
S. P. Q. R.
JVRE Ac Aere suo.
Tanquam Thesavrvm svvm mvnivit
Instav ravitornavit
A.D. MDCXCII. ’

‘ When Dante was exiled from Florence
Ravenna most generously received him,
Rejoicing in him alive, and honouring him dead.
To his great ashes

(Though such a field was small for their magnificence)
The Princes of Polenta by erecting, and Bembo the
Prætor by sumptuously adorning,

A sepulchre precious to the Muses and Apollo,
Did pious service.

Which sepulchre,

Almost decayed by the injuries of Time,
The Council and People of Ravenna
The most Eminent Domenico Maria Corsi, the Legate,
And Giovanni Salviati, the Prolegate,
Making it their charge
To reconcile, by perpetual honour, to his own country
Their great citizen,
In their own right, and at their own cost,
Did establish, repair, and adorn.

A.D. MDCXCII.¹

Not satisfied with this written record of his restoration, the Cardinal emphasized his share in it by causing his coat of arms to be engraved on a shield outside the tomb, flanked by that of Monsignore Salviati, Legate of the province, on one side, and that of the Franciscan community on the other.

The report of the master-builder Cicognini is preserved, in which he states that he completed his work under the guard, and with the protection of forty sbirri, while the Fathers of the venerable convent of San Francesco came constantly to the spot, complaining and lamenting, and making all the disturbance they could to hinder the work. There is also extant the testimony of the sculptor Berthoz:

‘In the month of June, 1692, I engraved in marble, with great care, the three coats of arms, according to the

¹ Translation by J. S. Phillimore, Esq.

orders which I had received. Moreover, I solemnly attest that at the same time the workmen under my direction polished the marble of the sepulchral urn which contains, *it is said*, the bones of Dante the Poet, and all the other surrounding marbles which adorn the tomb.'

The significant words, 'it is said,' show that the sculptor was well aware of the tradition of the empty sarcophagus.

The question was again raised during the legal proceedings which ensued between the magistrates of Ravenna, backed by Cardinal Corsi, and the Franciscan Brothers, as to the right of jurisdiction over the sepulchre. The matter reached a climax when an escaped felon claimed the right of sanctuary within the precincts of the tomb of Dante. The Padre Guardiano of the Franciscans claimed the right of ecclesiastical immunity for the wretched man, who was, notwithstanding, forcibly dragged back to prison.

The authorities, still backed by the Vatican, had recourse, to justify their action, to the argument that Dante having been condemned as a heretic after death, the place of his burial, far from having any claim to the rights of a sanctuary, was, on the contrary, polluted! Then the Franciscans themselves made use of the rumour that the bones were no longer there, rather than lose their right of jurisdiction over the sepulchre. The magistrates declared that by the recent repairs the sepulchre stood isolated, the Franciscans that it still rested with its back to the wall of the con-

vent. Moreover, they pointed triumphantly to the shield of their community which the Cardinal had himself affixed to the sepulchre.

Thus the dispute continued in more or less degree throughout the century. The Franciscan Brothers, by sheer obstinacy, held their own, and wearied out the Vatican, so that we actually find Cardinal Valentino Gonzaga, the Papal Legate, taking them into his counsels when he undertook, in 1780, under the auspices of Pius VI., the third and last restoration of the tomb. This time, Camillo Morigia, a gentleman and native of Ravenna, was chosen as the architect. Preserving the work of Lombardi inside, he threw the exterior into the shape of the little mausoleum or temple which it now assumes.

The florid style of the period, adapted for some mock classic memorial in a pleasure-garden, surrounded with myrtles and weeping willows, ill accords with the severity of the Franciscan environments, the dark foliage of the tall cypress, the grim tower of San Francesco, black with centuries, rising behind it, still less with the stern grandeur of the poet himself. The work was complete when the Gonzaga shield was made to crown the entrance.

The mausoleum was inaugurated in June, 1782, when a meeting of the Accademia degli Informi, in Ravenna, was assembled to celebrate the occasion by compositions in prose and verse, which, as an Italian writer observes, 'had more to say

about the Cardinal than about Dante.' Underneath the sarcophagus the Cardinal placed a marble urn, in which were enclosed some coins of the time of Pius VI., and a parchment relating the extent and cost of the undertaking. He then wrote, as follows, the sixth and last epitaph :

‘ Danti Alighiero
Poetæ . svi . Temporis . Primo
Restitvtori
Politioris Hvmanitatis
Gvido . et Hostasius Polentiani
Clienti . et Hospiti . Peregre . Defvncto
Monvmentum . Fecervnt
Bernardus . Bembus . Prätor . Venet . Ravenn .
Pro . Meritis . Eivs . Ornatu . Excolvit
Aloysivs . Valentivs . Gonzaga . Card
Leg. Prov. Æmil.
Svperiorvm . Temporvm . Negligenti Corrvptvm
Operibvs Ampliatis.
Mvnificentia . sva Restitvendvm.
Cvravit.
Anno . MDCC.LXXX.’

‘To Dante Alighieri,
The first Poet of his Time,
The restorer of Classical Elegance and Learning,
Dead in a foreign country,
Guido and Hostasio Polenziano
His Patron and Host
Erected this Monument.
Bernardo Bembo, Governor for Venice at Ravenna,
Decorated and adorned it
As Dante deserved.

Aloisio Valenzio Gonzaga, Cardinal
 Legate for the Province of Emilia,
 Of his munificence
 Improved and restored

What the neglect of preceding generations had allowed to
 decay.

A.D. MDCCLXXX.¹

It now remained to prove that the tomb which he had so lavishly adorned was indeed the receptacle of the remains of the poet ; therefore, in the presence of a few selected witnesses sworn to secrecy, the sarcophagus was opened. The Cardinal was obliged to take refuge in ambiguous phrases to conceal the result from the people. But the entry of one of the Franciscan friars in a missal, now in the hands of the Municipio at Ravenna, states the bald fact :

‘The coffin of Dante was opened, and nothing was found inside, so it was sealed up again with the Cardinal’s signet ring, and strict silence was observed as to everything.’

The Franciscans may have found a not unnatural solace for the loss of their jurisdiction over the tomb by making this record, for we read that the Cardinal, on leaving Ravenna, placed the key in the hands of the magistrate, and, nothing daunted by the result of the investigation, recommended to his most careful preservation so noble and so glorious a relic of the past.

Two Cardinals, both Papal Legates, in two suc-

¹ Translation by J. S. Phillimore, Esq.

ceeding centuries had spent themselves in adorning the tomb of Dante. Their sculptured coats of arms made part of its architectural ornament, and florid epitaphs connected their names with his. Then, by a curious irony of fate, the République Cisalpine came upon the well-worn scene. Dressed in their little brief authority, they made use of it to remind the people of Ravenna, as citizens and brothers, that the great champion, who had exposed the 'imposture of sacerdotalism,' the Signor dell' Altissimo Canto, the Divine Dante, was their fellow-citizen, and that his glorious memory must be democratically celebrated, bidding them hasten with laurel and myrtle to his tomb to shed the tears which flow from the eyes of a patriot over a genius who has deserved well of humanity.

The deputies of the République Cisalpine do not appear to have been troubled with any disquieting fears that they were paying homage to an empty shrine; but in 1841 we find the fact again stated with unmistakable plainness in Filippo Mordani's memoirs of Dionigi Strocchi. He recounts that on July 1, 1841, Dionigi Strocchi said to him :

'There is something I wish to tell you, now that we are alone. Do you know that the coffin of Dante is empty; the bones are no longer there. The Archbishop Monsignore Codronchi told me this; but do not breathe a word about it, for it is a secret.'¹

¹ F. Mordani 'Operette della Vita privata di L. Strocchi,' vol. iii., p. 232.

Another quarter of a century and the festivities for the sexcentenary of Dante's birth were being celebrated all over Italy. They were made the occasion by Florence for her last demand for his remains. The *Municipio* of Florence wrote as follows to the *Municipio* of Ravenna, May 7, 1864 :

'One of the first considerations present to the minds of the Commissioners¹ is the eager desire that the remains of the great poet should be laid to rest in his native city ; and because this desire is most warmly shared by all alike, and that it was debated for a long while how it should be expressed, it was decided that publicly, by means of the press and by private initiative, the Commission should interpret to you the general wish of the people.'

Il Carobbi, the Gonfaloniere that year, addressing himself to the chief magistrate of Ravenna, then added :

'I am sure you will make use of all your influence before the Common Council to obtain a favourable reply to the demand of the Florentines, because by this act they desire to repair the wrong done by their ancestors, and the disastrous treatment Dante has received at their hands.'

The *Municipio* of Ravenna replied briefly that they could not grant the request, and that

'The deposit of the sacred remains of Dante Alighieri in Ravenna could no longer, owing to the happily altered conditions of Italy, be looked upon as a perpetuation of

¹ Appointed by the Government to arrange the plan of the festivities.

his exile, as all the cities of Italy were now united in one enduring bond under one rule.'

Even while they drew up this reply, there must have been a strong prevailing impression in their minds that in truth the coveted remains were no longer in the sepulchre at all. However, the finale of the great festival, which was naturally to take place at Ravenna, was drawing near, and the climax at hand when the coffin would be opened for the purpose of verifying the remains.

The workmen were actually engaged in making preparations for the scaffolding round the tomb, so as to enable the bystanders to obtain a better view of the ceremony. A portion of the outer wall of the adjoining Chapel of Braccioforte, which had blocked the original ingress to the chapel, had been demolished, and a further clearance was contemplated, when it became necessary to introduce a pump to get rid of the water which proved a constant hindrance to the work. The pump was placed in the angle made by the Fantuzzi, afterwards called the Rasponi, Chapel and that of Braccioforte, but it was found that the handle could not work on account of some fragments still standing of the wall which had taken the place of the original entrance.

The inspector of the works, G. B. Lorenzetti, then directed the principal stone-mason, Pio di Luigi Felletti, to take away a few of the stones of the blocked doorway so as to give play to the handle of the pump. The mason, trying now

here and now there to introduce his mattock into the wall, suddenly came upon a cavity, and felt his tool strike against wood which gave back a hollow sound. His curiosity being roused, the mason removed carefully other surrounding stones, when there appeared a wooden box which partially fell to pieces, revealing some portions of a human skeleton. At the bottom of the box was the inscription :

‘Dantis Ossa Denuper revisa die 3 Junii 1677,’

and further examination discovered another inscription similarly written on one of the outer planks of the chest :

‘Dantis Ossa
A Me
Fra Antonio Santi
Hic posita. Anno 1677
Die 18 Octobris.’

Amazed at this discovery, Felletti and Angelo Dradi, his fellow-workman, quickly replaced the bones in the box, and, securing it as best they could, conveyed the precious receptacle into the adjoining mausoleum of Dante. In a very short time the news of the discovery spread like wildfire through the city. The authorities arrived in haste, and in their presence a deed was drawn up by the notary, stating the discovery, while the populace outside could hardly be restrained from

breaking down the iron gate of the mausoleum in their mixed frenzy of curiosity and joy, while they remembered a tradition current in the city, that the Chapel of Braccioforte contained a treasure which one day would be yielded up.

Medical experts—Professor Cavaliere Giovanni Puglioli and Claudio Bertozzi—made a careful examination of the bones, and proceeded to reconstruct the skeleton. The minutiae of their examination, though full of interest for a medical or scientific treatise, would not be fitly placed here, but for the purpose of identification they were all sufficient to prove that the remains were indeed those of Dante. The stature answered to that of the poet as nearly as the measurement of a skeleton can represent the living form, and the skull found in the chest corresponded exactly with the mask taken from Dante's face immediately after his death, which was brought from Florence for the purpose of making this comparison.

The next step was to examine the sarcophagus in the chapel, and here we will quote the words of Dr. Moore, who received from an eye-witness the account of the proceedings :

'The writer [*i.e.*, Dr. Moore] met, a few years ago, one who was present on this most interesting occasion, and who had carried away, and still preserved as a relic, a small portion of the precious dust which was found at the bottom of the tomb. This examination took place on June 7, 1865, and *the tomb was then found to be empty*,

with the exception of a little earthy or dusty substance, and a few bones corresponding with most of those missing in the chest recently discovered, and these were certified by the surgeon present to belong undoubtedly to the same skeleton. There were found in it, also, a few withered laurel leaves, which possess a special interest in reference to the description of Dante's burial to which we have already referred. It contained, further, some broken fragments of Greek marble, of the same material as the sarcophagus itself. These were soon found to proceed from a rude hole which had been knocked through the sarcophagus at the back, precisely at the part accessible only from the inside of the monastery, through which, beyond all doubt, the removal of the bones had been effected. This hole had been stopped up with bricks and cement, and then plastered over outside so as to leave no mark.¹

By the light of subsequent history we must now retrace our steps to the period of the abstraction of the remains from the sepulchre. In 1483, the date of the reconstruction of the tomb by Bernardo Bembo, the remains were in it, and were naturally left there. Bernardo's epitaph, already cited at length, and still to be seen upon the left wall of the mausoleum, is a standing record of the fact. In 1520, when about to be claimed by the Florentines, they were gone. But it was not till April 14, 1890, that the culminating proof was supplied as to how the removal of the

¹ *Historical Review*, October, 1888, 'The Tomb of Dante,' p. 648.

remains had been effected. Signor Ricci describes that on that day he obtained leave from Monsignore Uberti, the priest in charge of the Church of San Francesco, to enter the monastery, and having marked on the wall of the cloister the exact place corresponding with the broken part of the sarcophagus of Dante on the other side, the bricklayers were instructed to chip away the plaster from the wall. They had hardly been at work half an hour, when the uneven surface of the wall, exactly behind the sarcophagus, betrayed where the hole had been made, the even course of the bricks being interrupted and broken, and then filled up again with different material, brickbats, and rubble. Here, then, was the aperture made by the Franciscan Brotherhood, through which, in the dead of the night, in the year 1520, they had withdrawn the bones of Dante from their tomb, to save them for Ravenna from the covetous grasp of Florence.

But as the first inscription by Fra Antonio, 'Denuper revisa' (revisited anew), bears date June 3, 1677, and the second, 'Hic Posita,' October, 1677, it is evident that the remains must have been preserved somewhere in the convent for more than one hundred and fifty years before, at the date of the second inscription, they were built into the new piece of the wall erected to block the old entrance to the Braccioforte chapel.

This, no doubt, furnished the opportunity long coveted for depositing them in a place of safety,

where no despoiler could reach them. Fra Antonio did not let it slip. He hastened to relieve the Franciscan Superiors from the burden of a secret which must have been transmitted by each in turn to his successor in office for a century and a half. It is recorded that Fra Antonio Santi occupied an important official position in the convent in 1672, and held it till after 1677, the date of his inscription. He was alive in 1703, when Cardinal Corsi was busying himself with the repairs of the tomb, and was obliged to send forty sbirri to protect his workmen from the harassing attacks of the Franciscans, who probably feared the discovery of their secret. It was fortunate for Fra Antonio and his brotherhood that the Cardinal's repairs did not extend to the sarcophagus itself. At length the works were completed.

The Padre Superiore must have drawn a long breath of relief, and a vague tradition prevailed among the Frati, which they kept secret among themselves, that the chapel of Braccioforte contained a great treasure.

As late as 1865, a writer states that at that time relatives of the last Warden were still existing who remembered having heard of the same tradition from his lips.

There was yet another tradition present to the minds of the people at the time of the great discovery.

The sacristan of the Franciscan Confraternity, called *La Confraternità della Mercede*, was wont to sleep in the damp recesses of the ancient chapel of Braccioforte. His name was Angelo Grillo. Ricci,¹ in his great work, tells us that in 1890 there were many who remembered him in Ravenna, and that he used to indicate the corner of the chapel where the doorway had been blocked up, and to relate a dream which, though turned into ridicule at the time, when viewed by the light of subsequent events is at least worthy of attention. The narrative is as follows :

The sacristan declared himself to have seen in his dream a shade issue from the spot indicated, clad in red, and that it passed through the chapel into the adjoining cemetery. It approached him, and, on being asked who it was, replied, 'I am Dante.'

The sacristan died in May, 1865. A few days afterwards (it will be remembered that the 27th was the day of the discovery), in that very angle of the chapel where the doorway had been blocked, were found the bones of Dante. It was not a posthumous dream, or a story made up after the event by the old sacristan, for, being dead, he was not there to make it. The facts are as they stand, and as lately as 1890 there were witnesses alive to prove them. They bear a curiously close resemblance to the dream of

¹ 'Ult. Rif.,' p. 174.

Jacopo Alighieri, as recorded by Boccaccio, which has been so studiously discredited by the negative attacks of modern criticism.

This last touch of the marvellous forms the concluding link to the chain of an undoubtedly remarkable history, which those who visit Ravenna can verify for themselves. On the wall of the cloister in San Francesco they can read the inscription which recites how that was the very spot where, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the aperture was made by the Franciscans, through which they penetrated into the sarcophagus of Dante, and withdrew from it his remains, thus securing for ever the possession of them to Ravenna.

In the Biblioteca Nazionale they can see the wooden chest, or box, carefully preserved, exactly as it was, with the two inscriptions by Fra Antonio Santi, and the Custodian of the library, Achille Pasquali, will tell them, as he told the writer of these pages, that he had himself seen the box fall from the wall and empty its precious contents upon the ground. In the same place can also be seen the cast taken from the skeleton in the glass coffin where the remains themselves were exposed to the exultant populace of Ravenna. For three days, June 24, 25, and 26, they lay in state in the midst of the ancient chapel of Braccioforte, that through the now opened archway they might be visible to the thronging crowds

who came in hundreds and thousands from all parts of Italy to file before the crystal coffin. The old and the infirm were supported through the crowd, and children too young to be conscious of what they saw were taken up to the coffin, in order that in after-years they might say that they also had gazed on Dante.

Finally, on June 26, the remains were once more consigned to their original tomb. ‘Italia Una,’ represented by every province and every town, stood uncovered before that bier, and assisted, with every pomp of circumstance and every mark of respect, to lay at last to undisturbed rest the greatest of her sons.

Still the nation deliberates how to raise a fitting monument to his memory, and perhaps the day will come when the little, quiet sixteenth-century monument will, like the Porziuncula of St. Francis of Assisi, have as grand an environment as the chapel of Sta. Maria degli Angeli.

Some such tribute to their ‘great heir of fame’ might be more in accordance with the greatness of a free, united kingdom, but it could not enhance the greatness of Dante, and in the perfect simplicity and thoughtful attitude of the figure in bas-relief, still reading, still pondering, there is something which suggests the one aim of his life upon earth, ‘Diligite justitiam’ (Love righteousness), and, when that life was completed, the reflection :

'Qual si lamenta perchè qui si muoia
Per viver colassù non vide quivi
Lo refrigerio dell' eterna ploia.'

Par., xiv. 23.

Whoso laments that we must doff this garb
Of frail mortality, thenceforth to live
Immortally above, he hath not seen
The sweet refreshing of that heavenly shower.'

THE END.

Elliot Stock, 62, Paternoster Row, London.

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